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THE GREAT DEBUREAU



THE  
GREAT  
DEBUREAU

BY  
FRANCIS KOZIK

Translated by Dora Round

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■

As a historical foundation the author used the books of the writers mentioned in this novel, especially J. Janin; also the historical works of A. Séché, G. Lenôtre, G. de Nerval, and S. Guitry.

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# CONTENTS

## PART I

	PAGE
I. BORN BETWEEN TWO WARS . . . . .	3
II. THROUGH KICKS AND BLOWS . . . . .	9
III. THE FRENCH LEGACY . . . . .	14
IV. TEN YEARS OF WANDERINGS . . . . .	21
V. WELCOME TO PARIS . . . . .	26
VI. THE MEETING WITH THE EMPEROR . . . . .	32
VII. THE GLORIOUS PEOPLE OF PARIS . . . . .	37
VIII. THE GREAT TEST . . . . .	48
IX. THE SECOND FRIENDSHIP . . . . .	62
X. ON THE STAGE HEAD DOWNWARDS . . . . .	72
XI. SON OF SANSON . . . . .	81
XII. ALONG THE TIGHTROPE AFTER HAPPINESS . . . . .	87
XIII. THE EXECUTIONER'S FRIEND . . . . .	99
XIV. VICTOR HUGO . . . . .	112
XV. A NATION IN MOURNING . . . . .	133
XVI. THREE PARTINGS . . . . .	138
XVII. A NIGHT OF BITTER FAME . . . . .	148
XVIII. THE TAVERN "A L'OURS BLANC" . . . . .	157
XIX. SUICIDE . . . . .	164

## PART II

I. SPEECH WITHOUT WORDS . . . . .	175
II. THE BIRTH OF PIERROT . . . . .	184
III. PIERROT'S PREMIERE . . . . .	194

	PAGE
IV. GASPARD IS A ROMANTIC MODEL . . . . .	198
V. DEBUREAU BIDS FAREWELL TO THE THEATER . . . . .	206
VI. DESIREE . . . . .	221
VII. THE SCIENCE OF PIERROT . . . . .	233
VIII. LOVE WITHOUT SLIPPERS . . . . .	237
IX. A STAR RISES . . . . .	246
X. HAPPINESS AND GENEROSITY . . . . .	257
XI. MONSIEUR GODET ON THE SCENE . . . . .	265
XII. THE BEST WEDDING PRESENT . . . . .	271
XIII. IN THE RANKS OF THE ROMANTICS . . . . .	280
XIV. DEBUREAU AT THE BARRICADES . . . . .	290
XV. THE THIRD SAD FRIEND . . . . .	299
XVI. JANIN'S BOOK . . . . .	309
XVII. TWO INVITATIONS . . . . .	321
XVIII. LA DAME AUX CAMELIAS . . . . .	331
XIX. THE MEETING WITH ARMAND DUVAL . . . . .	342
XX. A MURDERER IN PRISON . . . . .	349
XXI. FORGOTTEN FLOWERS . . . . .	355
XXII. PIERROT'S LAST APPEARANCE . . . . .	359
XXIII. THE LONGEST ROAD . . . . .	368

Jean Gaspard Debureau (whose real name was Jan Kaspar Dvorjak) was born at Kolin in Bohemia on July 31, 1796. He went to France, where, at the beginning of the 19th century, he became the greatest pantomime actor of the day with the whole of Paris at his feet. But a time came when he was forgotten by all. He lies in the cemetery of Père Lachaise and upon his tomb are engraved the words: "Here lies the man who said everything without ever speaking a word."





PART I

ONE evening in November 1840, a tall man dressed in black knocked at Doctor Ricordo's. The doctor looked at his interesting visitor, took in at a glance his high forehead, his pale face, and his thin, ascetic lips.

"You are ill, Monsieur?"

"Yes, doctor, fatally I think."

"What is the matter with you?"

"I feel sad, I am in despair, I have a horror of myself and of everybody else."

"Your case isn't so desperate, my friend. I know a remedy for you."

"What remedy?"

"It will cure you of all these troubles. Go to the theater and see Debureau!"

The pale man bowed and answered sadly:

"I am Debureau, doctor."

This story is told of all great comedians. But is only true of Debureau.

## I

### BORN BETWEEN TWO WARS

NONE of the children born towards the end of the eighteenth century can be said to have had a cheerful youth. When they looked for fathers and mothers, all they found were shaking hands, eyes looking far away over their heads and hearts empty of all future hope. More scars and wrinkles showed on men's faces and more tears ran down women's cheeks than ever before. In the shadow of their fear and uncertainty the children grew up.

By then the ghostly trail of the Great Revolution was becoming dimmer, and the echo of the guillotine resounded but faintly from the walls of the towns of Europe. Hardly had the smell of blood faded from the air, letting folk breathe deeply again, than the smell of gunpowder was there once more. High in the heavens, above the smoldering fires rose a great, maddening star, white, bright, but already tinged with red: Napoleon Bonaparte!

People everywhere paused to look towards the West. There was a man who had power over their loves and their lives. How they admired him! How they envied him! His grenadiers marched out through the gates of Paris—and good-bye to their wives, mistresses, children! They put on their blue, white, and red coats, they shoulder their muskets and are off to the war. To horse!

Then would follow a period of rest, just to let them feel what peace was like, and again, off and away over the muddy roads!

It was lucky that the man had so many enemies. He overcame them all, it is true, but only one at a time. And the enemies were silly and quarrelsome—not their soldiers. They fought like lions, would have defeated even his guards, not to mention his generals; but they were let down, one regiment after another, by the gentlemen who minced in and out of drawing rooms, decorations flashing upon their big paunches and titles of nobility draping them like cloaks. They had no idea of tactics and spent their time in useless chatter and compliments. Thus the Corsican finished off his enemies, one by one.

Austria kept quiet while he finished Italy.

And so they fill up the depleted ranks as best they can before suppressing the royalists at home. Ah! They will have a good rest when he finally goes off to Egypt. More conscripts will have to be raised, but the oldest of them will be released.

Jan Dvorjak did not even know whether he was a soldier or not. He had been in camp near Kolin for almost a year. The soldiers helped the peasants in the fields; some made themselves at home with the workers and the small tenants in Sary Kolin. On Sundays they went to Novy Kolin to hear Mass in the Cathedral, and in the evenings the younger men walked out with the girls, but the older ones stayed with their wives. Next to the real military camp, the marching women had one of their own from which arose constant shouting, children's cries, songs and general hubbub. But Dvorjak's wife was not there; he was a gunsmith, he earned his living and could pay for Madeleine's small room in Novy Kolin. He slept there more often than in camp. He loved her, his French wife, his Madeleine. It was ten years since they both left the small village of La Brienne, in the neighborhood of Nancy. The Austrians were helping the French royalists against the revolutionaries. They were defeated and many Austrians and Czechs fell; but it was then that Jan met Madeleine Debureau, and in one night became her lover. "Le soldat triste" she called him, and gave him her love. Her parents were drowned when a small brook overflowed during their flight from the village. Madeleine had no heart to stay any longer in La Brienne and when the army marched away three days later, she followed the "sorrowful soldier." He was happy and proud to have a marching woman as his mistress, especially a French one. There were many of these women in the regiment, especially amongst the Czechs, but his own was the prettiest, everyone had to agree. Her eyes, her face, her whole body were radiant with the gaiety of French red wine.

"I was born in the vineyards," Madeleine would say to her lover when he held her in his arms. Whenever he embraced her, Kaspar would swear that the smell of sun and warm vine foliage emanated from her skin; when he kissed her it was like crushing ripe grapes.

"Tell me, why are you so sad?" she would ask. And he explained in the broken French which he had picked up during the last ten years in the company of prisoners, comrades, and peasants, that he had no idea why, he did not even feel unhappy, probably it was just his nature.

And so she threw in her lot with him.

One day, when they had just crossed the Belgian frontier, they got married. They already had a son. Madeleine with her son at her breast marched with her husband to his own country; later on, when he became gunsmith, she was able to ride on the armored car. The armored car was the first home they had, particularly during a long stay in Bohemia. Their daughter was born there too, and later on another son and another daughter. As soon as each of these children was weaned, Jan sent them to live with a cousin in Osek near Nymburk. But when he asked her to take his fourth child, she sent him word that she would send back all the children if ever he asked her to take a fifth.

So when it was certain that he would make his permanent home at Kolin, Dvorjak decided to have his children back into his home. He wrote to his cousin about it and looked forward to seeing them again soon. And to add to his joy his wife told him the same day that he might expect his fifth child.

So little Jan Kaspar did not go to Osek. He was born on the last day of July 1796. While he was growing up, campaigns were won and lost; but he did not care for Napoleon or trifles like that. He had his own worries, he must fight for his place on his mother's lap. But he had the best chance; the other children, who had grown up away from home were not so intimate with their parents.

In the home of the Dvorjaks there was a growing coldness, the more so because Madeleine began to think increasingly of France. Little Kaspar seemed more her child than the others. When the older children got more accustomed to their parents, they envied him their mother's favor and disliked him. But the old armorer—who stayed on as armorer to the military warden, when his regiment went to Poland—loved his five children. And when he was eventually sent for to rejoin his regiment—during the siege of Warsaw—he took the three-year-old Jan Kaspar with him, while Madeleine stayed in Kolin with the other children. The siege went on and on, and Dvorjak stayed there almost a year. He and Jan Kaspar came home safely, but the members of the family grew more and more estranged.

The two eldest children had joined a strolling player, they danced and learned rope dancing and kept the rest of the family during their father's absence. But about this the youngest of the Dvorjaks did not know much at the time. His first memories of

his childhood were quite different, and they clung to him to the end of his days.

The entrance of Kolin Cathedral was through a lofty porch of great yellow stones, the weight of which could be gauged from their close wedging into the wall. It was suddenly very dark in the entrance, and the coolness and darkness struck through Kaspar and made him shiver. A few steps over paving stones, each the size of a tombstone—instinctively clinging tighter to his mother's hand as he stepped across them—the darkness disappeared, the walls rose to a great height and he felt so tiny, so insignificant standing there under that enormous dome in the scented and colorful church. Little Kaspar could not see so high; he clung to his mother and followed her as she made her way to the side altar through kneeling and moving people. She bowed and knelt down, the boy at her side. She folded her hands and said her prayers, alternately bowing her head and lifting her eyes to the holy image.

"Say your prayers," she whispered to her son.

Jan Kaspar folded his hands obediently, but he did not say his prayers. That would be a waste of time. It was so lovely in there, he liked it. A cloud of incense rose from the altar, and Jan Kaspar opened his nostrils wide to breathe it in. The place was specially beautiful in the spring when people brought hyacinths and set them on the altars. The sweet scent gradually filled the church, and as it permeated the cool vastness of the sacred building it uplifted him and made him feel very near to God.

But the church was not everything to him. His main interest was in the worshipers. Drunk with his surroundings, he looked round him happily. They were kneeling beside him, in front of him, behind him—men and women, old and young, and Jan Kaspar enjoyed watching them, looking up at their faces from below, guessing the words on their lips and watching their eyes as they opened or closed.

"Yes!" he whispered in answer, and stared at a big and brawny grocer in the congregation who knelt there penitently striking his chest with a humble and devout look on his face. After a time the man stopped praying and looked as if lost in thought; then, pulling himself together he prayed again, bowing his head. Jan Kaspar smiled, he was happy without knowing why. If he were older, he might understand. He felt that he caught somebody in the act, so to say, of taking a leap in the dark into

forbidden places, and it reminded him of the circus, where his sister danced, when the horsewoman lifted her skirts and let the public see her legs and her lace-frilled knickers. But after the humble grocer had finished his exhausting prayers, the boy turned to find a thin woman kneeling behind him as motionless as a statue, her lips moving swiftly and silently, but in her eyes a look of anguish and fear which he felt to be ridiculous.

Some of the people looked very stern, with a sternness as heavy and overpowering as the scent of the hyacinths, which floated around the richly colored windows and the organ playing in the loft. The music seemed to him like a perfume. When the organ played hymns, he enjoyed watching grave, silent men, devoutly crossing themselves with eyes fixed upon the cross, or pretty young girls with faith in their hearts and chaste eyes lowered to the flagstones they knelt on.

"You aren't saying your prayers!" whispered Madeleine, catching him wandering.

Jan Kaspar concentrated on his prayers and with zeal and defiance took up the attitude of the penitent grocer and began striking his little chest. His mother prodded him. Jan Kaspar's mind went back to his prayers and he stared at the image of the Virgin with dull and anguished eyes. His mother took hold of his hand, got up and left the church with him. Good-by hyacinths and organ music!

"Why do you play the fool?" scolded Madeleine.

Jan Kaspar did not know and shook his head.

"You silly!" said Madeleine and boxed his ears. Although such scenes were frequent, his love for the Cathedral did not wane. Even when he went to school he never failed to visit the Cathedral every Sunday morning, and he would never miss any of the special festivals. He loved and respected the mystery emanating from the processions held in May and nothing made him happier than to be allowed to join the choir boys or to hold the censer. For him these were red letter days, giving him a share in what he admired so much.

Military parades were very dear to his heart as well. He would stand and watch his father with eyes full of admiration whenever Jan Dvorjak put on and fastened his braided tunic and brushed his shako. And he always managed to be in the front row in the crowd to get the best view of the officer mounting his red saddle with head bent and a frown on his face and to watch the soldiers with their waxed mustaches and expressionless



faces, smartly stepping along. He liked playing at parades, either alone or with other boys in the school grounds, or on the river banks. The other boys did not want him because he was small and sometimes looked so stupid. But when he was playing, his little face would lose all traces of childishness, and could mimic the sullen-looking officer better than any of them.

Sometimes he would shamefacedly play "parades" or "Corpus Christi" at home, though his brothers jeered and his sisters ignored him. The usual way to show their appreciation of his doings was to box his ears if they happened to be near him. They had all inherited a certain pride and smartness from their father, and cleverness and courage from their mother; but the youngest child was not their equal, and his silly antics made things worse. The result was that seven-year-old Jan Kaspar had a rather bad time and conceived a dislike for them all. He accepted his father's strict rule and his mother's bouts of ill temper as a matter of course; but the cruelty of his brothers and sisters whom he always tried to please was bitter to him. He felt it unjust and longed in his heart to be revenged upon them all. He wanted revenge—and he knew of no one to take his troubles to.

Only sometimes—he managed to run away to the muddy river bed of the Elbe and tell his troubles to the reeds, and the frogs, and the night.

## II

### THROUGH KICKS AND BLOWS

IT was not the fate of Jan Dvorjak's family to end their humble lives amongst the people of Kolin and to lie there at peace through eternity. Perhaps Madeleine first roused the desire for adventure, spurred by a spirit of restlessness. It is difficult to say how it really began. She met some French prisoners from her own province, and they told her that she had been left a house or some kind of estate at Amiens by her grandmother. Madeleine laughed at this information and forgot all about it for three whole days. Then she thought it over again, and began to discuss it with her husband. A legacy at Amiens! An estate! A house! By winter they had reached the point of talking of a splendid summer residence left in the care of servants whose one anxiety was to find the mistress who should look after the property.

"But we shall never get there!" Dvorjak would say, and Madeleine acquiesced until one day she plucked up courage and said: "Why not?"

When spring came round Dvorjak in his turn said: "Why not?" and began to think what had to be done to put the plan into practice.

The outlook seemed to brighten. Luck was on the side of the Allies against Napoleon. Their soldiers fought like lions—but in the end, the ministers spoiled everything and Napoleon dictated the peace on his own terms; he took Belgium and his enemies had to be thankful that he took no more. But when Dvorjak heard that the treaty had been signed at Amiens he was startled. He took it to be a call of fate and decided to take his family to claim their French property. He secured release from his military duties, counted up his savings, added to these his soldier's pay, and from then on did nothing but add up figures and make calculations.

The eldest son, Frederick, undertook to train his brothers and sisters. They had to dance, stand on their heads, and above all, walk on a tightrope stretched from gate to fence across the yard at their home. One of the younger boys played on the guitar and the youngest daughter Dorothy learned to whistle. The neigh-

bors tried to have them arrested by the gendarmerie. But Dvorjak was obstinate; he decided that he would go to France as a strolling player.

He got a clear idea from the circus owner of the profits he made out of his children and he reckoned that they could pay their way across Europe and even have a couple of gold pieces left to spend in France before taking over their estate.

At last one evening they left Kolin. Jan Kaspar bade farewell to his muddy river bed. It was at sunset; the sky was stained a reddish hue, and the Elbe seemed brimful of blood. It was May. As they rode away—on the military transport wagon going to Nuremberg, the last echo of the Angelus seemed to speed them on—a few lanterns splashed light over their wagon, and then nothing remained but the darkness to which they had entrusted themselves. Jan Kaspar slept a little and, half dozing, heard his father's sharp voice as he walked beside the wagon talking to the driver.

If the days preceding departure had been like purgatory for Jan Kaspar, those that followed were not like heaven! The journey to France was hell for him. Unluckily, he could not control his limbs as well as he could his face—he was horribly clumsy and awkward.

"Now then, jump! Once more, jump!" scolded his father.

"Jump, Kaspar, do jump," his mother sobbed, trying to save him from a beating. But the boy's whole body trembled; he was terribly frightened, and whenever he ventured to jump he took it so awkwardly that as often as not he would land on his head when he should have landed on his feet. His brothers and sisters turned up their noses at him and said scornfully,

"Where on earth did they dig up the brat?"

Papa Dvorjak's plans did not turn out according to his expectations. The first performances, especially those on Sundays, had been very successful. The people were kind, rich, and only too glad to admire the Dvorjak family. And there was something to admire. Dvorjak had purchased from his children's former employer all the necessary scenery and costumes, scarves, belts, spangled dresses, shirts and ribbons. Everything else that they needed Madeleine and the two girls made themselves. It was a very pleasing sight when he appeared in his red shirt, strong and broad shouldered, with his two nimble and smart-looking boys dressed in yellow shirts and black trousers, who jumped deftly

on to their father's shoulders, while his two beautiful girls, their shimmering dresses shooting golden sparks, danced gracefully round them. However, the effect was not so good when the youngest boy appeared on the scene. How Jan Kaspar cursed the fact that he had been born the last. If only it had not been left to him to climb up this human pyramid! If only it had not been his allotted part to jump down from this dangerous position or to be the living ball which they bravely bounced about!

"He'll get used to it," the father would say.

"He'll hurt himself!" the brothers thought.

The truth was that he did hurt himself, but he never got used to it. It felt like facing death each time he did his act, and each somersault he made seemed to him likely to be his last.

As a rule something went wrong with each performance. Everything was wonderful at the beginning of the turn, and the audience shivered at the courage of Dvorjak's elder sons, admired their agility and smartness, but as soon as little Jan Kaspar came on there were titters and the previous good impression disappeared. The artists took their bows smiling, but no sooner were they behind the curtain of the wagon than there was a rush to be first to get hold of their darling and settle accounts with him. At first his father took his part, but he turned against him when at last he realized that Jan Kaspar was quite hopeless and that the clumsy chick would never become a fighting cock. In his heart of hearts he looked on Jan's failure as treason towards himself—he felt that he had been robbed, and manifested this feeling to his son through the medium of kicks and blows.

Dvorjak's miscalculations helped to make his situation still worse. He and his family soon found themselves in a country ravaged by the recent war; and although they tried to keep clear of it, they found nothing but distress, dullness, and indifference. Where previously they had always had a few coppers left over for a glass of beer with their cheese and enough left to hire a cart to move their wealth of properties on to the next place—they were now lucky to be able to eat their fill and trudge on a bit with their load. Kaspar did not feel these changes as much as the others; he had never been given the glass of beer which was the privilege of his successful brothers, there was nothing left for him but a box on the ear if he arrived late at the inn. Nor had he ridden much in the cart, so he walked again. But he now had to carry coiled round him the rope which his sisters used for their marvelous feats, and he nearly broke down under its weight.

Small wonder if the sight of a well to jump into would have been welcome to him after trudging several hours in glaring sun without a drop of water to quench his thirst, and with that millstone of a rope round his neck to pull him down. All that Kaspar wanted during the performances and in his private life was to be seen as little as possible. On the stage he would anxiously watch the faces of the audience. Everything depended on them! If these people hissed when he fell, his share would be a beating and no supper. If they laughed, he would at least get a slice of bread and no beating to speak of. He hated to be stared at as if he were a strange animal. But the Bavarian and Alsatian country people did not realize what was the matter with the ridiculous little clown; they paid their money and wanted value for it. Jan Kaspar watchfully studied their expressions. The fear of a beating sharpened his wits, and he could always read them. He knew that a single hiss would start them all making catcalls and that a loud guffaw would be the signal for applause from an enthusiastic crowd.

When this happened he enjoyed taking round the collecting box after the performance, for people made fun of him, joked with him and gave him more money than they would to his brothers and sisters.

His father himself noticed this preference on the part of the audience. Sometimes kindly, at other times more roughly, he tried to make Kaspar be always as successful, but this he could not do. Now and again the boy made a good jump, but nothing could ever take away his fear. The amusement of the crowd at the boy's funny falls gave Dvorjak a new idea. Kaspar should be a clown, he declared. His brothers and sisters considered this a great come down and showed him that they thought so, but he did not care, he was happy. No more jumps on and off other shoulders, no more walking on his hands! He had rejoiced too soon. There were far worse things before him than he had yet gone through. He did not mind their taking away his pretty, glittering costumes and making him dress in patched and mended rags, but his new work was dreadful. Up to then his falls had been accidental, now he had to fall purposely. He was compelled to fall on his head with his feet in the air, not because he could not help himself, but because he was told to. He simply had to make an awkward copy of all his lightfooted brothers' and sisters' actions. If they flew through the air as light as a feather, he had to fall like a lump of lead. Public cuffings and kicks were added to those behind the scenes. There was not much to choose between

them. It was not hatred on the part of his family. In the course of their troublesome wanderings they had come to think of him as their scapegoat, good for nothing else.

"We all have to earn our living," they said.

They earned theirs by their work and strength, he earned his by taking blows and kicks. It seemed quite fair. He took fall upon fall as best he could and not a sound would be heard. Then he would cast imploring glances at his father, but Dvorjak with a look bade him repeat it, and the boy had no choice but to obey. He picked himself up and took the fall again—and his head began to swim. He was lucky if a few titters were heard, he would have torn himself in pieces to wring a laugh from the crowd; that would have meant a good supper and a little rest for him. A slice of bread and butter was a feast and his greatest joy was to be left alone by the rest of his family. He would go on falling and falling with his broken little face, bleeding nose and swollen eyes, and cry out in his heart: Laugh, you devils! Oh, do for God's sake laugh, and I'll thank you to the end of my days! Oh, you cold-blooded beasts, do laugh!

### III

#### THE FRENCH LEGACY

THE nearer they came to the French frontier, the more often Madeleine would lose herself in long silent dreams or give way to bouts of childish temper. As soon as they had passed the frontier, she meant to kiss the soil of her native France. And at the first village, they would buy a bottle of red wine, hold it up against the sky and let its rays show up the rich warm color; after that they would drink it. And they would pour a few drops on the ground as a libation. It seemed to her that not only she but her children too had come home. They were her children, blood of her blood, they belonged there, as she did.

The long journey had changed her. While her husband seemed heartened by each new obstacle and difficulty and had become more manly and sure of himself, she had grown thin and careworn; but as they neared the end of their wanderings she brightened. She seemed to see the hills which she knew and loved, long before they had reached the frontier. She discovered trees, flowers, like the ones she used to know, and she even recognized the night stars.

But when the time came, everything turned out very differently from what Madeleine Dvorjak had fancied. The sun was not shining, there was no money for wine, the roads were muddy and a cold north wind was blowing. They had passed through the Ardennes Mountains at harvest time, but now it was autumn and in the north of France it was colder and rainier than Bohemia. So she did not kneel and kiss the soil of her native land. When the soldiers let them through all they did was to wrap their coats and shabby rags more tightly round them, and proceed forlornly along on their way. But for this wet welcome how much more pleasant the sight of France would have been! People here were richer and more kindly. From the point of view of the poor little clown they were a splendid audience. They laughed freely when some turn took their fancy; they were satisfied with Kaspar's half jumps. Sometimes his elder brothers and sisters forgot to scold him and would jump over the benches to join in his fun. It was a good

thing that they reached the frontier when they did, for Kaspar had made up his mind to run away. But life became less unbearable now, and besides, they were drawing nearer and nearer to their goal, and it would have been silly to run away, with the days and nights growing colder, when in a few days they would take possession of their castle. Moreover, they were in the country of that mighty, hated and glorious superman, Napoleon. The child imagined him a kind of god, high above the clouds and aureoled by the rays of the sun and the light of the stars, as he presided over his immense armies, his oceans of soldiers, guns, muskets and spears. He thought of him as a god whose radiance no human eye could bear to look upon. He feared him as he feared everything supernatural and at the same time held him in such veneration that were he to pray at all, it would be to him.

Amiens!

The goal of their many months' wanderings! The heavenly dream of seven people who had starved and struggled, endured and suffered for a belief in coming wealth; an earthly paradise, the vision of which had spurred them on over endless miles, amongst strange people, on cold and wintry nights.

Amiens!

Alluring future for which they had left their country and the firm ground under their feet. They looked at each beautiful house and imagined it theirs, but each time they turned away, not finding them imposing or beautiful enough. The mayor of the town received them rather coldly. Yes, there was such an estate. It had stood empty these three years, waiting for someone to come and claim it. Madeleine looked reproachfully at her husband. They could have been living there in comfort and wealth for three years. And he had prevented them from coming.

The mayor called a gendarme and roughly told him to show the immigrants their property. The Dvorjaks did not dare ask any more questions. They thanked him and without a word they followed the gendarme. He took them back the way they had come. Now, with increasing curiosity they looked at all the beautiful houses they were passing, and they waited expectantly for their guide to lift up his hand and say: Here! Madeleine questioned him, but the man shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. After that she did not ask any more questions. She felt it would humiliate her.

They came to the center of the town, and the gendarme



stopped at last. He glanced quickly at all these queer foreigners, then he lifted his hand and said, "Here you are!" And before they had time to say a word, he added quietly, "If you ever need anything, just let me know!"

Then he walked quickly away.

They had so often met danger and had to make their escape at the last moment. But not one of them dared to speak. It was a silence such as often precedes hysteria. And then they gradually crept nearer and nearer as if hoping that it was not too late, that everything would change and that the ugly picture before them would vanish.

"No, no," whispered Madeleine. "It could not be!" Their house! Their estate! Their wonderful dream of wealth and life in security. All they could see was a dilapidated building; some of the walls were in ruins, mended here and there with wood; the fence was tumbling down, the roof was broken and the whole place thick in dirt. It could never have been more than a hovel, and since the last owner had been carried out of it, nobody had looked after it at all.

The eldest son gave a push to the door. It fell down and a cloud of dust rose inside. Madeleine peeped in—nothing but cobwebs, dirt, mustiness. Just for a second there was a ray of hope in her heart. Perhaps it could be cleaned up, mended, rebuilt.

"Not a stick that holds together," said her husband, answering her unspoken question and extinguishing her secret hope.

No, nothing could be done. It was a day of despair. They had all suddenly become so small and weak, they who had always shown such radiant courage and strength. Kaspar wished then that he could rise above them, grow strong and mighty and have it in his power to say:

"Come, Mother, I'll take you somewhere else, where everything will be all right. Come along, all of you, I'll be your Napoleon!"

There was no hope of repairing the house; everything that they touched was rotten and crumbling. Everything breathed coldness and horror. They went back to seek the friendly official's advice. They needed him. They must save what they could. They camped in the backyard and organized a performance there for the same evening. It was a Sunday. The following Wednesday they sold their legacy. They did not get much for it, but for all that they suddenly found themselves in possession of more money than they had had in the whole of their journey. All his life

Kaspar clearly remembered that day when they all ate to their hearts' content. The happy state lasted about a week. They took a rest and lived upon the proceeds of their inheritance. For very rage they felt they could have eaten it all up, so as to get something back for the poverty and distress which it had brought upon them.

But when the francs began to disappear one by one, they had to make plans for the future. The owner of the yard where they were camping told them that he would soon need the place. Their friend, the inspector, told them that the mayor would probably have them arrested if they stayed on there without paying. So they would have to go—go back to Bohemia. There was nothing else for it.

One day Jan Dvorjak counted up his last few francs and betook himself to town. He brought back with him a lean, heavy-footed mare harnessed to a small wicker cart covered with a tarpaulin. All the family went into raptures over it. The mare, which had cost eighteen francs, still showed signs of cruel encounters; she was nothing but skin and bone and was covered all over with scars of mysterious origin. However, she became the darling of them all and was joyously accepted as one of the family.

A few days later they left Amiens for good.

They did not reach the frontier. December was coming on, a mild, wet December without snow, and at the next small town, they found crowds of vehicles already on their way to Paris. Napoleon Bonaparte was to be crowned Emperor of the French. Business instinct told them what possibilities this coming event held for them, and they headed for the south. Once more they had to struggle for their living with their jumps and somersaults and on the whole did pretty well. They were in a hurry. At first Madeleine still dreamed of going to Bohemia, but the prospect of a golden harvest lured them on to Paris, so they put aside their longing and harnessing the mare to the cart, hastened towards Paris.

Another bitter disappointment awaited them there. They were looking forward to entering the city; they pronounced the name of Paris with awe. They imagined gay and receptive audiences, money flowing in. But at the gates of Paris they were turned back. The police would not allow suspicious characters to enter. All their arguments were useless. Jan Kaspar peered out from

beneath the tarpaulin trying in vain to get a glimpse of the towers of the longed-for city. It was raining and foggy, and all that he could see in front of him was a black mass of towers and the faces of a few soldiers who swore, brushed the rain from their cheeks and showed poor old Dvorjak back the way he had come.

There was nothing to do but to bow to the inevitable. They turned back and found shelter for a time under a tree, waiting for the rain to stop.

"Do you think we'd better go back home?" Dvorjak asked his wife.

Madeleine glanced at her husband's sharp thin face to see the effect of the words and said:

"I don't think we'd better go back."

"All right," nodded Dvorjak, "but where shall we go?"

"Let's go south, it's more sunny and warm there."

"Yes, let's go south!" said Dvorjak and without another look at any of them he urged the mare forward.

To the south!

"Vive l'Empereur! Vive l'Empereur!" the people shouted all along their way.

Treacherous Paris lay behind them. They felt humiliated at being compelled to keep clear of it, and so did not care about the city any more. They revenged themselves by hating it from a distance. Little Kaspar alone remembered it with awe. That it was forbidden increased its attraction, and during the long nights when it was his turn to keep watch he dwelled on the thought of the streets of Paris, its palaces, and its Napoleon.

His sufferings began again, all of them: the kicks, the painful falls on his head, the injuries to hands and teeth and nose. He had a rather less severe cuffing when things were looking up and a much harder one when times were bad. But at least they did not have to tramp on foot and stay in any miserable hole that they could find. The cart carried them on and on, to larger towns where there was hope of earning more. Kaspar was given fresh tasks; he might sleep all day while his elder brothers walked behind the cart or took turns on the front seat. But there was no sleep for him at night. As soon as the family had crowded under the tarpaulin, his turn came to sit up and watch, lest anything were stolen. Many a tramp or down-trodden peasant looked with envy at the poor living skeleton of a mare and would have stolen her if there had been a chance. In fine weather they spent the

nights in the woods, not in villages, for they felt safer under the trees. When they had finished their performance, they packed up their things, had their supper and then drove out of the village and camped in the open. They would tether the mare to a tree, cover her back with an old blanket, put a handful of grass or hay before her and jump into the cart to enjoy a well-earned sleep. But eight-year-old Kaspar had to keep awake. He was not frightened, he just felt lonely and sad. He would talk to the mare, listening enviously to the quiet breathing of his brothers, prowl round the cart, and then curl up for a rest under the tree to which the horse was tethered. Towards morning, when the chill of the air crept through his clothes, he would get up, jump into the cart and creep between his brothers. Usually his father got up then and gave him his place.

Although the nights seemed endless, Kaspar preferred those spent in the open in the spring to the winter nights in alleys or stables. When it rained, they stayed at inns, or with friendly peasants or workmen, huddling into a small dark room, where they could hardly breathe, yet thankful to be allowed to sleep on the bare floor. So when spring came again and they were further south where they once more could sleep in the open under the stars, Kaspar felt happier and more free.

The boy came to see many things in these long, waking dreams. He thought so much, remembered so much, longed for so much! He liked to fancy himself in his brothers' place; performing undreamed of marvels before an immense crowd. The audience would gaze at him, with eyes full of admiration and exclaim: Look, just look! Then they would shout and applaud him, and he would bow his thanks—not too deeply so as not to give himself away. And he would give them a smile, quite a flattered little smile! And then the guards from the Paris gates would come, bow lower still to him and respectfully ask him to follow them to their master, the Emperor Napoleon, who would like to see him perform; the Emperor had heard about him and greatly desired to meet him. He obeyed the command of course, and this indifferent and cruel Paris changed towards him, gave him recognition and was ashamed that he had been driven away from its gates.

When Kaspar reached the end of his daring dreams, he began to think over all the people whom he had met during the day. He thought of them one after the other, and his memory lingered with those whom he liked best, recalling their personalities and

mannerisms. He did not dislike these people; he did not notice them as people but liked them for their funny ways. The longer he remained a mountebank and got used to the kicks which seemed to be his allotted daily bread, the more he studied people and their peculiarities. He had a preference for the French, he felt more at home amongst them than far away, where faces were dark, sorrowful, and cold.

## IV

### TEN YEARS OF WANDERINGS

NAPOLEON'S shadow pursued them.

The name of great battles followed in their wake, sending them either crowds of cheerful spectators or rows of empty benches as an audience.

Ulm! Trafalgar!

The name was bearing south. So the Dvorjaks determined to get out of the orbit of this name which had the power to cause such unrest amongst all the people with whom they came in contact.

On their way to Marseilles their eighteen-franc mare died of hunger. None of them cried, not even the youngest. Each new trouble merely seemed to them a slightly harder crust of bread to swallow.

Tramping on foot again!

But it was there that Kaspar met with an adventure which he remembered all his life.

Suddenly an elegant coach drawn by a team of beautiful horses came up to the place where their fallen mare and cart blocked the way. The coachman stopped. The dead mare had to be shifted from the middle of the road. Cursing with all his might, the coachman volunteered to help the three Dvorjaks. Then an officer in a very smart uniform stepped out of the coach; he turned back to say a few words to someone inside, then helped a pale and lovely lady and a little boy to get out. Another woman, apparently a nurse, stayed inside with a smaller boy. The officer, in a tunic covered with gold braid and medals, noticed Kaspar looking, with eyes full of admiration, at the smart coach and its occupants. He asked him who he was and what had happened.

"Strolling players?" he marveled. "And what can you do?"

The boy stepped back to turn a somersault.

"Wait a minute," said the officer and took him to the coach where a pale-faced boy about five years old sat looking out.

"Now, do it here!" he ordered.

Kaspar stepped back and turned a somersault in the air. This brought a ghost of a smile to the lips of the little boy.

"Once more?" the officer asked. The child nodded. The officer threw a coin to Kaspar who repeated his performance, then watched his success. The child closed his tired eyes and sank back on the cushions, his beautiful black curls falling over his forehead.

"That's enough!" said the officer.

Kaspar turned back and was glad that this was enough. He did not like this kind of audience. What that whimpering child needed was a box on the ear instead of a circus performance all to himself. He spat on the ground. But somebody put a hand on his shoulder. The elder and taller boy was speaking to him:

"Would you like a sweet?" he said.

Kaspar had not tasted a sweet since the fair at home, when he had managed to snatch a piece of gingerbread from a stall. He nodded.

"But will you show me that somersault again?"

Kaspar's pride had been wounded. He glanced spitefully at the carriage where the pale child was hiding. But before his eyes was the sweet!

"Come round here!"

He went round to the back of the carriage, and Kaspar overcame his annoyance and turned the somersault.

"My name is Eugène," the boy said. "Eugène Hugo."

"And is that your brother?" Kaspar inquired, trying not to show his extreme enjoyment of the sweet melting in his mouth.

Eugène waved his hand.

"Victor? Oh, don't take any notice of him! Abel is much better, but he isn't going with us. I like you, you know. I'd like to be able to do things like you."

That was a different tune altogether. So Kaspar put his sweet down on the grass.

"Look here, do you like this?"

And for no reward at all, he turned three cartwheels and added a back somersault. Eugène was eager to try them, which would have been his undoing. Fortunately, the task of moving the mare was finished and his father called him back. He gave Kaspar a military salute, smiled kindly at him and ran away.

The officer and his companions got in their coach again. At the last minute he put his hand in his pocket and produced a few coins for the Dvorjaks. They bowed low when the carriage passed

them. Eugène waved his hand and Kaspar waved back, quickly sucking his sweet so as not to be forced to share it with the others.

When the Dvorjaks had finished their pilgrimage along the French coast, they tried to follow it into Spain; but Napoleon's shadow followed them everywhere, and where it rested fires would flame up. Little Kaspar saw people kill each other. The first night in Spain he saw crucified French soldiers with their faces pierced; and the next night he saw the comrades of these crucified soldiers ravage a whole village in revenge. So the third night they re-entered French territory, thankful not to have been thrown into the flames with all the women and children of the ravaged village. Their eagerness to try where they could earn most urged them forward. The longing for distant countries was in them—something drew them on. Even when they reached a district where their audiences were inexhaustible, they were not satisfied. Often some tramp told them of a place where people paid with gold for a performance, and they would set off to find it. Kaspar wandered through the world with his eyes open. He was fourteen, but he was experienced as a man of a hundred.

When they were at Toulon, little Kaspar was almost trampled by the crowd which was watching the meeting of King Louis and his wife Hortense. Kaspar saw him, but this king could not compare with his Emperor, even if he was related to him. Indeed, people sang low songs about him on the quayside, and Kaspar was very glad when he heard later on that Napoleon had deposed this incapable king. Kaspar would have done that himself.

Then they went to Italy, but they could feel an atmosphere of hatred and mystery on all sides. People were not interested in what was going on around them; they looked strangely at each other, winked when they met, and when they parted they whispered portentously to each other. When the Dvorjaks reached Mantua a man had just been executed for revolting against Napoleon. Kaspar remembered his name: Andreas Hofer.

Against Napoleon! That seemed strange to Kaspar. But it was not the first time that he had met with this attitude. And it was always surrounded with mystery and heroism. In spite of it all, Kaspar believed in his Napoleon! He listened to the gossip of the farm women in France, Italy and Germany—all of them hated Napoleon. He was taking their husbands and sons. Because one man wanted more and more of the world, heaps of corpses were piling up and streams of blood were flowing. Kaspar under-



stood that. But he was sure that Napoleon had the best intentions; only it was a pity, that he could not go himself and explain his reasons to them or else take pity on their distress and finish fighting. When Kaspar talked it over with his father, old Dvorjak replied:

"Look here, that's like turning a somersault and then suddenly stopping in the middle. It's too late for that. And that's the trouble with Napoleon."

The idea of Napoleon's turning a somersault seemed ridiculous to Kaspar and the thought that he would turn it badly and perhaps not fall on his feet was even worse. He was sure that the great Emperor must be as agile and swift as a lion. The glory of Ulm had traveled down to Dalmatia where the Dvorjaks were playing. Then came Jena. And after that Austerlitz.

By then the Dvorjaks were far away in Turkey. They gave their most splendid performance in Constantinople. For a whole month they played to a crowded theater and on the thirtieth day a high official called on them in their tent—they had a horse, a caravan and a tent once more. At first they were frightened, perhaps they had disobeyed the laws of these people of another belief; but they soon understood that they were invited to the Palace to give the performance which had fascinated their suburban audiences for a whole month. This was something strange, mysterious, and exciting—a new, unforgettable event. They were led, accompanied by a body of guards, into a beautiful palace, up staircases and through doors—wherever they passed stood soldiers with turbans and spears—till finally they were shown into a hall which did not seem at all magnificent. It was an enormously high hall; the walls looked like gold and in the middle was a fountain. And in one corner hung a long white opaque curtain which almost reached the ceiling. They waited for the curtains to be parted revealing their distinguished audience. But they hung motionless; and the servant who had entered with them ordered them to begin.

They agreed afterwards—when they talked it over—that it had been their worst performance. No audience! The girls walked along the rope and jumped off and nobody applauded. Only now and then they seemed to hear a whisper, when they performed a more dangerous feat. Otherwise nothing, absolutely nothing but their jumps and somersaults before this white motionless curtain.

Yet there was something! When they formed their last brave group in which old Dvorjak balanced on his forehead the bar on the top of which his elder sons hung while Kaspar stood on their

heads, Kaspar saw something from his perch. He saw what no mortal was ever allowed to see on pain of savage penalties. The Sultan's favorites! He only saw them for a moment when he climbed up on to the heads of his brothers. But in that moment he felt enveloped in a heavy, intoxicating scent which rose from a mist of gauze, flowers, and perfume. For a moment he caught sight of several beautiful women gazing at the curtain, which must be transparent from their side. He saw their colorful gowns, their hair hanging to their shoulders; and he saw the naked breasts of servants waving long fans. Then his father threw away the bar and Kaspar had to jump down, and he was glad because he could not have borne the scent and the vision much longer—he would have had one of his clownish falls, and that would have been bad.

Even when they left with a rich reward, he never told his brothers anything about this adventure. He kept it as a secret, all his own. He had never seen beautiful naked women like that before. He knew that his sisters were pretty, but that was not the same. He often looked round at girls playing by the roadside as their caravan passed, or ventured to fix his eyes on some young girl in the audience. But this was the first time that he had been struck by women's beauty. And for the first time Kaspar did not regret that he was the youngest of the family and that the dangerous top of the pyramid always fell to his share!

With the memory of Turkey they traveled back through poorer countries. They passed through the whole of Germany, where Kaspar never ate more than bread and his own tears. He was sixteen when they stood once more at the gates of Paris, after eight years of wanderings. It was March. France welcomed them with glory and rejoicings. And in Paris a salute of a hundred and one guns announced that a son had been born to the Emperor, the King of Rome.

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## V

### WELCOME TO PARIS

PARIS!

You say the word Paris as you might say "the world." You say Paris, and you hear the names of her kings, her revolutionaries, and her emperor, who is unique in the world. You hear the names of great painters whose pictures you have never seen, but who must paint better than nature. You hear the names of writers and above all of singers—actors—

Oh, Paris! with what reverence did Jan Kaspar Dvorjak approach you in his sixteenth year. The leaves which trembled in avenues and parks were different from any which he had seen in the whole world. The people whom he met were different, and the water flowing by in the Seine, muddy though it was, meant more to him than the holy water in the churches. The night, slowly spreading from the hill of Montmartre over the city, was full of mystery; the women outshone all other women in the world.

And Paris blinked the green eyes of her shutters at this little foreigner, shrugged her dirty, dusty shoulders, but at the same time invited him. Come! she whispered through the summer darkness, I'm ready! It seemed to Kaspar that the street before him was stretching itself with rippling movements like the limbs of a harlot waiting to surrender herself. Kaspar walked through the streets with his mouth watering. Each fresh glimpse, each fresh spectacle was half an amorous invitation, half a challenge to a duel. He clenched his fists in his pockets and breathed deeply. Oh, to be able to conquer you! Oh, to be great and glorious, to make but one corner of you respect me, to win a lump of your stone and a handful of your people for myself, to see at least a few women's eyes gazing at me with wonder—

And from his yearning and love for her was born an immense ambition.

On the right bank of the Seine, a good way from the center of the city, is the Rue St. Maur. It is in a poor quarter inhabited by small artisans, laborers, and folk who are nothing at all. In the

Rue St. Maur, in the courtyard of a large black house whose plaster was full of yawning cracks the Dvorjak family pitched their camp and gave their performance. Every day shortly after dusk—and in the afternoon on Sundays and fête days—father Dvorjak came out into the road before the gate and began a flowery speech in which he invited the passersby to visit a magnificent spectacle. Let it be in praise of the people of Paris that they did not need much pressing. Those were golden days for strolling players. Folk who had long lived under the oppressive shadow of the iron specter of war ventured to raise their eyes. They longed for shows and spectacles and wanted to be amused. And added to all that, they were Parisians, which meant that the Dvorjaks with their neck-breaking leaps and somersaults roused the respect of the whole neighborhood. And when one Sunday evening old Dvorjak let off twenty sous' worth of fireworks at the end of the show, the magnificent spectacle was remembered for at least a week.

The Dvorjaks began to prosper again. They began to dream of greater and more splendid productions, their own booth, band, a wild beast show. With the first few francs they saved they bought a clarinet, and Kaspar was forced to learn to play it. As this meant his release from his worst falls from the top of the "Egyptian pyramid" he did not make a fuss; it was more comfortable to press the keys and whistle into the little pipe than to balance himself in the air. No one taught him to play. The man who sold the instrument showed him how to manipulate it, and that had to do. Kaspar played as best he could. He played out of his head, and he played what he heard in the street. Most people either did not listen to him at all or else laughed. When he played too badly they hissed him. But one day something happened which gave him valuable experience.

The eldest son, Newmannseck, "the king of the carpet," was performing with the no less proficient Etienne and winning quite some applause for their daring. Meanwhile, Kaspar was playing an accompaniment. Suddenly the people started talking and singing, then they shouted and clapped till it was a wonder the ramshackle old house did not fall down. Kaspar stopped, alarmed. The two elder brothers looked bewildered, for they were not doing anything special at the moment, but some people standing at the back of the courtyard solved the mystery.

"Encore!" they shouted. "Play it again!" And some of them piped up, "Vous n'êtes plus Lisette!"

Kaspar could not remember what he had actually been playing, but the singing helped him. He began again. The crowd joined in and sang the popular song which Kaspar had picked up somewhere in the streets, "Vous n'êtes plus Lisette."

Besides a lot of hard work and a lot of poverty, Kaspar had a great deal of spare time, so he used to think over all the strange things that happened to him. Perhaps he had caught the habit as a little boy in the valley of the Elbe when he used to dream among the whispering reeds and the quiet backwaters. So he pondered on the extraordinary delight of the people of the quartier St. Maur at his playing. It did not take long to convince Kaspar that he would never master Paris until he knew her people well. When he knew what the people were and what they liked, who was to prevent him from catching them, fettering them, dominating them? And because he loved the people of Paris it did not seem to him very difficult to get to the bottom of their hearts. He began to look at them more attentively and to chat with them now and then.

He went into the gardens near the Palais Royal and watched how the well-to-do citizens and officers behaved. Up to now he knew very little of the upper classes and he was astonished at the way they shook hands on meeting: this English custom had just reached Paris. He wandered round the booths of the Italian ice-cream men who had set up round the Pavillion de Hanovre where there were concerts and firework displays, and he had to admit that they were grander than those which his father gave in the Rue St. Maur. He went to the Tuileries and stood in the crowd, full of lively curiosity as to what the Parisians talked and laughed about. Sometimes the people noticed him listening, and then they would warn each other silently and scatter as if they were afraid of something. Kaspar did not know what, but he got near to the truth once. He was whistling a tune when suddenly a tall, gaunt individual caught him by the shoulder.

"What are you whistling?"

"I don't know," answered Kaspar, truthfully.

"Take care, you—republican!" the tall man threatened him and vanished into the crowd.

After that Kaspar learned to distinguish between the secret police and the ordinary people, and to see who had mysterious errands and who were hurrying about their own simple business.

In the whirl of Parisian life the cruel past was slowly over-

shadowed in his memory; he forgot the Frenchmen whom he had seen crucified in the Pyrenees, and began to love the Frenchmen who sang "Vous n'êtes plus Lisette." He loved them and did not understand how anyone in the world could hate them. And his Napoleon was one of them.

Soon after the arrival of the Dvorjaks however, Napoleon drove away to Versailles and a couple of weeks later the troops were marching through Paris, bound for the Russian campaign. There was not a soldier left in Paris, they were all marching eastwards. Friends would greet each other with "A bas Alexandre!", and all the talk was of how Alexander would fall on his knees as soon as the Grande Armée appeared on the banks of the Volga. Here and there someone would utter fears about the bad climate, but they were silenced. Kaspar played "Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre" every day at the evening performance, to the great delight of the audience.

On the sixth of December that year Paris had all her lights on all night long.

Moscow had fallen.

Kaspar admired the way the people of Paris celebrated the victory, he admired the way they could break out in transports of enthusiasm, gaiety and delight, even while their Emperor and their army were far away in the dangerous snows.

Wonderful people of Paris!

But soon he was to see them in a less favorable light.

Ten days—and then the triumphant illuminations were put out. The Grande Armée had fallen to pieces like a worn-out rag. Paris waited.

After a few days the first despatches began to arrive. From the frontier to Paris sped carriages, open carts, and in them sat half-starved, unshaven officers who had not even taken off the women's disguises in which they had traveled across Russia, Prussia and Austria. A thousand miles behind them the grenadiers were staggering through the snowstorms.

"They all look ten years older!" said those who had time to besiege the Tuileries.

"The guard did not even recognize the Emperor when he came back!" another eye-witness affirmed.

"They say the Emperor wept when he saw his son again."

"No, he didn't, he hadn't even time to look at him."

Rumors flew about. Kaspar Dvorjak went over to the

Tuileries and wandered about outside. Once he caught a glimpse of the Emperor's son through the shrubs in the garden. He was sitting in a baby carriage shaped like a large silver shell and drawn by fallow deer. But Kaspar would rather have seen Napoleon himself. Just to see him—no more than that—just to see the Emperor once. Would not that be enough to fill his whole life?

He longed for just a peep at the distinguished people whose life he divined behind the tall windows of the Emperor's palace. He got to know a certain Monsieur Godet who lived in the same house as the Dvorjaks and walked on at the Opéra as "crowd." Godet got him into the theater about three times, to the Opéra when Mademoiselle Georges was playing, and to the tragedy of "Orestes." Kaspar could not understand a word of it, and from behind the pillar where Monsieur Godet had placed him he could hardly see anything either. He went to sleep during the second act, though Orestes was played by Talma himself. It all seemed to Kaspar quite incomprehensible and unnecessary; what he liked was the magnificent auditorium with its gold and plush and perfume. But he believed that the thing which all these beautiful and distinguished people were staring at with such attention must have some sense, though he himself could find nothing entertaining in the tragedy. It was cold, and dull, and long-winded.

He was sitting among the poor people in the theater, people who did not weigh their words long when they chatted in the interval, and thus he got a glimpse into their world.

"D'you think Papa Violet has had enough of it?"

Papa Violet—that was Napoleon; but Kaspar liked it best when they simply said "He." "He" meant that he was the only one in the world.

"Not a bit, you fool. He's going ahead. He's building up a new army."

"It won't be like the old army."

"Just you tell him that!"

"There'll be a smash."

"Be careful," the other warned him.

"I don't mean that. He is our Papa Violet—even if all the dead and all the blood are ours too."

In front of the two men, who might have been journeymen, sat a gentleman in a richly braided coat. He caught a few words and turned:

"You're right, boys. This new army and all these army taxes ought to stop. We've had enough of them."

"That's where you're wrong, sir," said the man who had spoken of the dead. "He's only got to nod and we'll all follow him."

"You're daft!" The master upholsterer in the comfortable seat tapped his forehead.

"That's as may be, but I'm not getting caught," answered the young artisan. "We poor folks love him. You'd better look at the curtain if you don't want me to call the police."

Kaspar learned at every step that the poorest citizens loved their Emperor sincerely. Kaspar himself believed in him. Often he thought of becoming one of his soldiers, distinguishing himself in battle and being presented to him. "Jan Kaspar Dvorjak," the Emperor would say. No, he wouldn't say that. He would never be able to pronounce such a stupid name. It was really an obstacle to Kaspar. No one could write it and no one could say it. As soon as they heard it they stared at him as if he were a foreigner and a suspicious character. He would have to take another name in the army, a French name. Was he really anything but French? His earliest memories were rooted here. He belonged here, he was going to stay here, therefore he was French. And when he grew up—he was nearing eighteen now—and got into the Garde Impériale, he would take another name. He would be French.

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## VI

### THE MEETING WITH THE EMPEROR

THE play-acting family of Dvorjaks was in rebellion over whether the individual members of it were really players of the first magnitude or only thought themselves so. They reproached and envied each other their successes, demanded a larger share of the program, and rebelled against being treated as children incapable of buying what they needed. The strained situation culminated when Newmannseck upset the whole Egyptian pyramid because he thought Etienne had deliberately trodden on his ear. The scene had a stormy sequel that evening. Newmannseck declared that he had had enough of his father's guardianship and wanted to found a family of his own. He was nearly thirty and therefore had a legal right to do so. There was a tremendous quarrel in which the father broke a chair over the head of his eldest son, but when they all woke up again after that dreadful night they realized that it would really be wisest to separate quietly. The same evening the places of Newmannseck and "la belle Hongroise" in the lower part of the pyramid were taken by Godet and his wife, who liked it better than being supers at the Opéra, which was only a part-time job.

The earnings of the Dvorjak family declined now, and the father often took Kaspar with him on a Sunday to the fair grounds and promenades to see if they could earn a little extra. Then towards the Christmas of 1813, old Dvorjak got a cough, so Kaspar set out by himself for St. Cloud, where there was some small court festival. The road was muddy, it was raining, and Kaspar tried in vain to shield his face from the cold wind. He plodded along by the roadside with his coat pulled over his head to shelter him a little from the storm; his red and yellow player's smock flapped in the wind. He glanced enviously at the coaches which drove past him with warmth and cheer behind their closed windows. The big wheels turned swiftly and each revolution splashed Kaspar with a shower of muddy water from the puddles.

The sky was gray, impenetrably gray. Kaspar was beginning to think about turning back when another coach passed him, but

this time it did not cover him with a shower of mud. On the contrary, it slowed down and stopped a few steps ahead of him. The door opened and a white glove motioned him to climb in. He looked round to see whether the silent and astonishing invitation was not intended for someone else. But no, he was alone in the road with nothing near him far and wide but the rain. Trembling, he approached the coach and set his foot on the painted step. Someone's hand took him by the shoulder and helped him up. The help was needed; for as he put his foot into the coach he had caught sight of the crest on the carriage door. It was the imperial crown, and beneath it was a great golden "N."

He did not know how or where he sat down; nor where to put his hands and feet nor where to look. He wished he could sink into the earth and vanish; if the shock had not paralyzed him he would have jumped out of the window of the coach head foremost. He did not even know what the man opposite him was saying. He heard a voice but he could not take in the words. But a repetition of the question—and of the kindly smile on the face opposite him—roused him to life. He blinked, opened his mouth and stammered:

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

"I asked you where you are going?" said the Emperor, smiling again.

"To St. Cloud, Your Majesty."

This was the Emperor, it was really the Emperor. Was it possible that he, a poor, needy clown, was sitting opposite Napoleon? A clown, with whom no well-to-do person would shake hands—and Napoleon! An apparition? A mistake? It was he, the man of Jena, of Ulm, of Egypt, Italy, Russia—the Napoleon of great generals and faithful grenadiers, of all France and all the world.

"Are you a player?"

"Yes, Sire," said Kaspar louder and with more self-command.

"What can you do?"

"I turn somersaults, play the clarinet, climb up a human pyramid, walk along the tightrope . . ."

Kaspar's mouth was dry, his words were hardly distinguishable. He went over the items of his art with a desperate conviction of their insignificance, seeking vainly for something which might impress the Emperor.

"French?"

"Yes," declared Kaspar firmly.

"What's your name?"

"Jean Gaspard Debureau." He was surprised at his own readiness. But he could not tell the Emperor that his name was Dvorjak, and his mother's name slid off his tongue without a second's thought.

"Debureau!" the Emperor repeated, caressing the name with his voice. "It has a nice rhythm: Debureau!" To Kaspar the name sounded doubly beautiful in the mouth of the great Emperor. "I saw your costume under your coat," Napoleon continued. "At least you won't get wet in here. I'm going to St. Cloud."

Kaspar's lips trembled.

"Thank you most hu-humbly—Your Majesty."

Napoleon waved his hand. He stared sadly at the rain, turning away from Kaspar, and without looking at him asked quietly:

"Have you ever been at the theater?"

Kaspar took advantage of the moment while the Emperor was not looking at him to study his face with great attention. The curve of the eyelashes, the wart above his nose, the hair falling on to his temples from under his hat, the curve of the eyebrows, the lower lip compressed and slightly thrust out. He devoured the face.

"Yes, Sire, I have."

"What did you see?"

"A tragedy."

"What did you think of it?"

There were two deep lines from the nose to the corners of the mouth. Kaspar stared at the face, seeing in it the flicker of campfires from all the battlefields of the world, the waving of flags, smoke, cheers— And the forehead, sloping down to the eyebrows— Staring at the face he did not think of the courtesy of his reply and answered honestly:

"I didn't like it."

"Why not?"

"It was—old-fashioned—and cold. I don't like that kind of thing." His own boldness shocked him, but the Emperor dispelled his fear.

"I don't like it either," he said with weariness in his voice. "They're simply warmed up imitations of the ancients without either style or life."

Kaspar was comforted. He would have been afraid to say

that if he had thought of the gorgeous boxes and the people in them, and here's the first man in the Empire insisting that it is so.

"I have no poets," smiled Napoleon, and turned once more to Kaspar.

"Your Majesty has everything!" he called rather than said.

"Do you think so? And for how long?"

Kaspar did not know why the Emperor was joking so strangely. There was no answer to such a question, and he returned to the subject of the theater.

"You're right. I have succeeded in creating almost everything—but not good tragedy. I have no poets—No, none. Their tragedies breathe coldness, they do not know how to make them."

"By your leave, Sire," ventured Kaspar, "I like the pantomimes and dumb-shows best. Perhaps they'd do better to write pantomimes instead of tragedies."

Napoleon smiled again, this time with sudden pleasure.

"Where have you seen pantomime?"

"In our quartier, Sire, in the Rue du Temple."

Napoleon nodded comprehendingly.

"I haven't, unfortunately. It's a pity. You may be right."

The coach swayed a little as the coachman turned aside and drove through a gateway into a courtyard. Kaspar trembled again, afraid of what was going to happen next. But nothing special happened. The coach stopped and a soldier opened the door.

"Hurry up," the Emperor bade Gaspard, who did not dare to move. And he alighted after him.

Napoleon threw his cloak round him, nodded to someone who greeted him from the palace door—if only Kaspar had had eyes for anyone but his Emperor!—and then gave his right hand to his fellow traveler. As though hypnotized Kaspar raised his hand and put it into the Emperor's white glove. He did not know what he ought to do: whether to kneel, or to kiss his hand. But he felt a brief, firm clasp and heard the Emperor say:

"Adieu, mon cher Debureau!"

"Sire!" he choked with emotion. He could not have knelt or kissed the hand now, but he would have liked to clasp the Emperor round the neck and all his courtiers with him. And because he felt that he must—he simply must—say something he burst out fervently:

"The people will never desert you, Sire!"

Napoleon merely inclined his forehead slightly and said quite seriously:

"I'm counting on that, mon cher. Au revoir." And his cloak flapped past Gaspard. As in a dream he saw the Emperor's silhouette disappear through the inner doorway, with bent head, eyes on the ground, hands clasped behind him. That was how he saw him, how he parted from him, and how he remembered him.

Long after it was all over Jean Gaspard walked up and down past the railings, touching the heavy bars and breathing deeply, reliving his experience, comparing it with his life, his fate.

"Mon cher Debureau . . . mon cher Debureau. . . ."

How sweet it was to repeat it. *He* had said that, Napoleon, the great Emperor, the master of the whole world!

"Mon cher Debureau . . ."

As far as any earnings went, his journey to St. Cloud was useless. He did not make even a sou. But he came home glowing and breathless and announced the great news to his family:

"I've found a name for myself! A name to use in France. I'm going to take mother's name: Debureau!"

"What d'you want with a stage name?" asked his father drily. "You can't do anything."

Gaspard stopped short. But his spirit was glowing.

"I? I'm going to act dumb-show!"

## VII

### THE GLORIOUS PEOPLE OF PARIS

THE glorious people of Paris!

How mean, how terrible you looked in the eyes of everyone who was not one of yourselves in the March days that followed! Was it so long ago that you celebrated your Emperor's victory and showed yourselves outwardly to be brave patriots and Frenchmen, faithful to your Emperor to the last breath? Was your patriotism only for his military success—and when that abandoned him, did you lose your love for your country?

During these days Jean Gaspard Debureau regretted having told Napoleon that he was French. He was ashamed of his love for this country, this city and its citizens.

After the prelude at Leipzig things moved so fast that there was no time for thought. When Gaspard looked bewildered these days his father said to him:

"They're fighting for freedom, you fool!"

"And he?"

"For power. To oppress them."

Gaspard understood that at last. In the course of his wanderings through dozens of countries he had come to know the sources of resistance and hatred of the power which was seeking to swallow them up. He could understand that. He expected to find this yearning for freedom in the French as well. But no, they did not set fire to their city like the Russians when they left Moscow. They welcomed their enemies more as liberators. Gaspard had never seen anything so senseless. He would have rushed to the defense if anyone had called him; but no one thought of doing that.

How must the Emperor have felt when he learned that his soldiers had abandoned him, when it was announced to him that he had been deposed by the Senate? Gaspard rushed through the streets to hear the news. He was afraid the Emperor would do something. He would have liked to rush to Fontainebleau, where Napoleon was said to be with his guard and a handful of faithful

generals. But as soon as it was known that Napoleon's Viennese wife had deserted him the gates were closed; no one was allowed out. All the town was preparing to welcome the enemy army. They were now only twenty—ten—five miles from Paris! Rumors and gossip flew from mouth to mouth and grew to gigantic proportions.

It seemed certain now that the Empire would fall. This was a great opportunity for those who had been pushed into the background for a time. The Republic, from which the Empire had grown, had no defenses. The fields blossomed with royalists. White cockades sprang up, at first timorously, but they increased like mushrooms after rain. The unsuccessful, those who felt neglected and were waiting for high office or better places, understood that their chance had come. The old regime was tottering, they must make sure of a place in the new. The ministers who were expected to remain in office received visit after visit. The royalist council sat uninterruptedly and sent couriers out on all sides. Money began to work. There were young men in the crowds who tried shouting, "Vive les Bourbons!"

Gaspard hurried uphill through the Paris streets. Not far from the top of Montmartre he found a house in the Rue de Bellefonds where he could go up the stairs and get a magnificent view from the window on the top landing. He knew already that the heroic attempt at resistance by the students of the Polytechnic, who had begun to build barricades at Menilmontant, was in vain. The Government had decided to surrender!

Terror broke out among the common people, but the bourgeois with chains across their waistcoats and well-brushed tall hats on their heads, said:

"It's all right. What's the use of fighting? Let them come and put things in order."

If a man from the working-class quarter were in the group, the question would shoot out:

"D'you want to give them our Paris? Have you got a heart?"

The rich bourgeois pointed to the proclamations stuck up at the street corners urging submission. The workers had leaflets printed trying to rouse feelings of patriotism at the last minute. But the police hurried along the street and tore the leaflets out of people's hands. Men in white cockades tried to convince the crowds of students that they were being urged to revolt by people

who had nothing to lose. But anyone who had some property of his own and wanted to save it must agree to surrender.

Gaspard understood that. How should it be otherwise? He almost laughed. These bourgeois were afraid for their handful of gold pieces and their wretched houses—they had the country and the people to thank for their riches and should have been the first to man the barricades! And instead of that they were quietly selling their country to the enemy. Was it not extraordinarily sad, extraordinarily bitter that the only ones who were ready to resist should be those who had nothing? The country denied them its wealth, shut them up in dirty black alleys on the fringe of the town, did not give them even enough to eat, and yet they were ready to die for her. Was not that strange? Wealth and self-sacrifice—they seemed to exclude each other, thought Gaspard.

And suddenly events began to rush on ahead of thought.

The Cossacks are on Montmartre! The news spread through Paris like lightning. No one had believed that the Allies would dare to enter Paris with their army. Gaspard hurried to his lookout place in the Rue de Bellefonds. Yes, he could see them there in the dusk of evening which was lit up by great campfires, and around them clustered the Cossacks in their tall caps. There were Prussians there too. They had met outside Paris to divide the spoil between them. Gaspard hurried back. No one walked calmly that evening. Everyone was hurrying—for news, for gain. There was no performance in the Rue St. Maur that night. The Dvorjaks were afraid of the days to come.

But it was better than could have been expected. It is true that the Russians and Prussians marched into Paris as if they were freeing the city from a heavy yoke. The city welcomed them with rejoicings.

"Vive le Tsar Alexandre!" the crowds shouted to the Russian officers.

"Vivent les belles Parisiennes!" answered the Russian soldiers.

And so they marched into the city. They did not behave badly. They had looked forward to the expedition not as conquerors but as men going on holiday to the delightful, world-renowned, frivolous city of Paris. They were curious about it. Who would have thought they would have got in so easily! And now it all belonged to them. The crowd of Bourbon fanatics who were waiting just inside the gates flung themselves upon the first column of cavalry and kissed the dusty boots of the officers.



Young girls waved from the windows. The foreigners smiled; they were happy; they had no grudge against anyone; they tried to talk French with the people, and only addressed their soldiers in their own tongue. The whole thing was a glorious pleasure trip.

The glorious people of Paris showed that it was! Anyone who had suddenly been put down there in the early days of April would have thought it was a national festival, not the capitulation and surrender of a city. The glorious people of Paris had their shops, their houses, their moneybags. It looked as though the army of occupation were going to be excellent customers. Then why not make merry? There were no performances at the theater for the first two days, but that was only because everyone was curious to see the Prussians changing guard, the Russians singing round their campfires, and the Czar's officers taking possession of the streets and squares. The theaters made up for it with various special performances to supply entertainment to their guests. Gaspard Debureau received a bit of buffeting when he tried to hinder a crowd of well-dressed men who were attempting to pull down the column with the Emperor's statue in the Place Vendôme. They drove him away, but the statue stood firm. And the third day the theaters played gaily on. The Parisians enjoyed themselves more than before and their victorious guests with them. Only the bankers, the businessmen and the speculators were not amused. They complained of the "revolution," they dined, and then went into their shops to cut and sell endless strips of white linen for flags, scarves and underclothes.

One evening Gaspard came home in tatters with a cut on his temple. The scarf round his neck was all stained with blood.

"Why did we stay here? Why did we turn French?" he cried. "I'm going away—I'm going tomorrow!"

It needed all his father's authority to bring him to reason. But it was hard to turn somersaults and act the clown when before his eyes all the while was the picture of those hundred French prisoners, led by a Prussian detachment. They marched in the early evening along the streets crowded with workmen.

"Where are you taking them? To a hospital?"

"No, to the camp in the Champs Elysées."

The young French prisoners were blood-stained and tattered, they could hardly drag themselves along, some supported the others. They were thin and unshaven. But the worst of all were

their eyes which stared at the houses, the shops, the people walking along the street and laughing. They looked like boys from the provinces, to judge by their astonished gaze. They seemed to be thinking—as far as fatigue would let them think at all: so this is the famous Paris? Then it's for this city, these people, that we've been dying, that we're led now like dumb animals through our own city?

Gaspard's eyes were full of tears as he watched; his young, unspoiled heart burned with the injustice of it all. He glanced about him. Some people by a lighted shop window were smiling. But those in front—workmen, laborers, artisans—they looked as if they felt as he did, clenching their fists, with anger and humiliation in their eyes.

Suddenly someone shouted:

"Comrades!"

And someone else:

"Let's set the prisoners free!"

A row of workmen flung themselves on the Prussian lances and sabers with nothing but their bare fists. Some of them already lay on the ground in their own blood. The Prussian officer gave the order for one file of the escort to turn and drive back the rioters on to the pavement. Gaspard sprang at the officer's horse in fury, but he received a saber cut and was flung aside. When he dragged himself to his feet the convoy of wounded were marching away in the distance. The police were restoring order, arresting the rioters. Someone was bearing down upon him, but Gaspard pulled himself together and vanished into the crowd.

And the Parisians, the other Parisians—those who stood in the lighted shop windows—applauded. They applauded as if they had been watching a successful farce at the theater. They applauded the Prussian soldiers for their promptitude in routing the French workers who wanted to free the French prisoners of war.

Gaspard rushed along. There was wormwood in his mouth. He could still hear those awful cries of "Vivat!" in the distance, where the glorious people of Paris were applauding the foreign soldiers.

And Gaspard hated them! He could not play on his clarinet nor make his grimaces, because he did not care a damn today whether anyone was amused or not.

He was sorry that he had ever wanted to be French. But the painful wound on his temple convinced him that he was.

"S'il me trouve en son chemin,  
 Il me frappe dans la main.  
     Quelle honneur!  
     Quelle bonheur!  
 Ah, Monsieur le sénateur,  
 Je suis votre humble serviteur."

Gaspard had the opportunity of hearing still more French songs, and Parisian ones too. Songs became a kind of quiet, unobtrusive rebellion of the working people against the wave of injustice which swept over them.

Louis XVIII mounted the throne in glory. The splendor of the Bourbons was rekindled. The heir to the king who had been executed returned triumphantly to the leadership of France; he thanked his protectors and bade them farewell with much ceremony. The Prussians and Russians left Paris.

"Please, what relation is the new king to Louis Sixteenth?" Debureau asked the people loitering round the royal palace. But they shrugged their shoulders. No one knew.

When the royal coach drove out through the gates everybody realized that they ought to shout something, just as they used to shout "Vive l'Empereur!" But no one seemed inclined to cheer the King. It was only when they saw the men of the old Imperial Guard in their familiar uniforms trotting beside the coach that they began to shout:

"Vive la Garde Impériale!"

And the bearded men on horseback answered gaily:

"Vive la Garde Nationale!"

It was a kind of compromise between the people and the man in the coach, and as it rolled away another song sprang to the people's lips; someone piped up with the first few words, and the others all joined in:

"J'ai parlé, parlé, parlé,  
 J'ai hurlé, hurlé, hurlé.  
     Quels dinés,  
     Quels dinés,  
 Les ministres m'ont donnés!  
 Oh, que j'ai fait de bons dinés!"

The songs were a helpless revenge on the rich climbers with their full bellies, who had got to the top. It was enough to wear a white cockade and be known not to have Bonapartist sympathies. Any braggart or poltroon, insignificant and incapable, now

had the way clear before him. The most insignificant grew the sharpest elbows; they wanted to get their reward for having been ignored in the past. They said it was a reward for their honor and merit, but the reason for it was merely their incapacity.

“Il était un roi d’Yvetôt  
Peu connu dans l’histoire;  
Se levant tard, se couchant tôt,  
Dormant fort bien, sans gloire . . .”

That was what the people sang about the man in the coach. Everything reminiscent of Bonaparte and his Grande Armée was banned. Every reminder was at once an insult to His Majesty. And Gaspard saw how more than half the city willingly fell in with this. They were the same people who were shouting “Vive le Roi!” exactly as they had shouted “Vive l’Empereur!” a few days earlier and “Vive la République!” a few years before that. But there were some who would not abandon their memories so easily. Gaspard himself was one of these. He hunted round for pictures of Napoleon, and when one day in the market he managed to buy secretly a forgotten brooch with Napoleon’s portrait, he was beside himself with happiness.

Along with other people he sang snatches of song which gathered force like an avalanche. The police were not able to stamp them out. They were easy, so easy that when you had once heard them you could repeat them; words and tune mattered very little; the meaning was everything.

“Dieu qui punit le tyran et l’esclave,  
Veut te voir libre et libre pour toujours.  
Que tes plaisirs ne soient plus une entrave.  
La Liberté doit sourire aux amours.”

“Who wrote that song?”

“Béranger.”

“And this one?”

“Béranger.”

Always Béranger! How Gaspard would have loved to know him! He had not liked songs much before, but now he loved them. He realized more and more that if there was truth and strength in one it was in the humblest, those who did not tremble like reeds nor crowd like flies on a carcass wherever there was a sign of gain. Gaspard thought Béranger a spirit almost as powerful as Napoleon. It was said that he had been begged to write

songs for the king and promised good payment, but he had answered that he did not want their money and would write them songs for nothing when the King gave freedom and happiness to France. Whether the story was true or not, it spread through all the working-class quarters and Gaspard learned once more that if a man wants to become an artist he must be the artist of these common, simple people who are so grateful, so enthusiastic and so sincere. Debureau wanted to act for these people and them alone. He no longer hankered after the humiliation of the boulevards. He longed to sacrifice himself to the poor quarters, to be their Béranger.

But how was he to do that with his somersaults and cart-wheels?

When winter came, more and more quarrels broke out in the family of players in the Rue St. Maur. To begin with, the Godets drank dreadfully. The performances became a game of chance. If they managed to keep on their feet, all went well; but if they had had a few sous in their pocket beforehand, things turned out deplorably. This caused endless quarrels between them and old Dvorjak who was an old soldier, for all his actor's profession, and brought up his children with the same discipline which he would have demanded of a new recruit. Then Etienne began to exhibit the same yearnings as the elder son, Newmannseck, who wrote from London that he was now earning more than the whole family had before he left it. Dorothy, the pearl of the family, was a very good girl and helped her parents as much as she could; but the owner of a circus had been paying court to her for a long time and offered her an exceptionally good position.

At last one day the famous acrobatic troupe was broken up. Etienne and his sister entered the circus, where they were so well paid that their parents were able to live fairly comfortably without working too hard. Thus Godet found himself in the street. He would not accept the real reason for the breakup, but insisted that Dvorjak owed him a grudge and was revenging himself. They had several quarrels at night under the windows of the Cour St. Maur until one evening they came to blows and Dvorjak showed what an old soldier can do. Godet was much younger, but he got a good beating. Dvorjak caught a bad cold in the wintry night, but that was not the end of the trouble.

It was Christmas Eve. The streets were full of hurrying

folk carrying parcels of sweetmeats and bottles of wine. The provision merchants' shops and general stores were full. Etienne had got a job as a riding master somewhere in Belgium and had his pockets full of money, so Madeleine had bought a turkey. It was standing on the table, roasted a beautiful golden brown and stuffed with mushrooms. Two bottles of good wine winked at it, and the room smelt of sliced pineapple. It was to be a Christmas Eve feast and at the same time a farewell party for the proud Etienne.

Suddenly a sergeant and two policemen walked into the room. Everyone was surprised. None of them had done anything wrong, so far as they knew.

The sergeant greeted them shortly and demanded:

"Where have you put your Bonaparte?"

"I haven't any Bonaparte here," answered Dvorjak.

"According to information received from Monsieur Godet, you have concealed a piece of jewelry containing the likeness of the ex-Emperor. That is a punishable offense. Confess!"

Dvorjak shook his head.

The sergeant nodded and his two men began to search. Gaspard trembled with horror. The revengeful Godet had remembered. The police knew where to look. The brooch with Napoleon's portrait was in a wooden box under the window. They found it at once.

"In the name of the law, I arrest you!" said the sergeant to Dvorjak.

"But, Messieurs, it's Christmas Eve!" cried Madeleine.

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders.

"But the thing's mine!" Gaspard shouted and came and stood before the police. "It's mine! I bought it! I hid it there!"

"Nonsense," roared the sergeant. "According to Monsieur Godet's statement . . ." Then for the first time he seemed to realize the pain which he was causing these people, and he added in a softer voice: "Orders is orders. I must do it."

"Do wait till tomorrow," begged Madeleine.

"I can't do that, Madame. Allons!"

All Gaspard's assurances and Madeleine's prayers and those of Etienne and Dorothy were in vain. Gaspard hurried beside the escort all the way to the prison, trying to convince the sergeant. But he had no ears for him; he was looking forward to his home and his Christmas dinner. Finally Dvorjak ordered Gaspard to go home and see after his mother.

"They can't do anything to me," said Gaspard's father.

"They mustn't do anything to you!" cried Gaspard in a tearful voice as his father disappeared through the heavy gates. "And as for Godet, I'll see to him . . ."

Gaspard went home again, choking with rage. Hatred was new to him, he had never before known it in its real likeness. But now hatred ate into him, devoured him, poisoned him. If he only had Godet in his hands, the revengeful devil, the deceitful traitor! He would certainly have killed him, torn him limb from limb. The refrain of one of Béranger's songs rang in his ears:

"Parlons bas,  
Parlons bas,  
Ici près j'ai vu Judas,  
J'ai vu Judas, j'ai vu Judas!"

It was the fault of Judas that no one touched the golden brown turkey that evening in the Dvorjak's room, nor the pineapple. They did not know what to do. Early next morning Etienne left for Brussels, making them promise to write to him or send him a message telling him what happened to his father.

Before the week was out they were able to tell him.

The acrobat Jan Dvorjak was found guilty of concealing a piece of jewelry containing the portrait of the ex-Emperor and condemned to three months' imprisonment.

They were painful days and weeks. Dorothy, who had quickly learned to ride and excelled in equestrian productions, was now her mother's sole support; Gaspard wandered about the town once more looking for a job. He thought a lot about his father. True, he had not been much attached to him before. Even when he meant well, Dvorjak was not a father to show much tenderness to his children. But when Gaspard thought of him now, in prison among thieves and scoundrels, when he knew that he was suffering innocently, he realized his good qualities: his sincerity, his energy, his industry. He hatched a hundred plans for liberating his father, but had to relinquish them all.

At last only one hope was left to him.

"Dieu qui punit le tyran et l'esclave . . ."

There was no truth to be found in the king who had destroyed every kind of liberty. Gaspard did not feel that so much, because he did not need newspapers, he was not interested in the right to vote, and he did not need to assemble with anyone. But he looked and found what he sought in others; it quivered in

their eyes, in the depths of their looks, in allegorical songs. Gaspard's observation grew more acute—and then he found it at every step in the dirty, trampled streets where he lived.

“He's coming!”

There will be truth and freedom once more when he returns among us. In his prayers for his imprisoned father Gaspard turned his thoughts unceasingly towards his Emperor. Only he could dispense justice. He was kept captive on some Italian island. Good watch was kept on him. But Napoleon was Napoleon. What was the sea to him? What were fortifications?

Debureau believed with the others.

And Napoleon did not disappoint him.



## VIII

### THE GREAT TEST

PARIS was as pleased with a surprise as a lady at a ball. She coquetted with one partner while waiting for the next. She was staring at Vienna where the gentlemen were carrying on their discussions, and suddenly a fresh partner stood beside her.

It was March once more and everything was as it had been last year. Only "Vive le Roi" had changed again to "Vive l'Empereur." But Gaspard already could distinguish between those who were really sincere and those who were only diverting attention from the fact that there was a spot on their hats bleached by a white cockade.

The Emperor had come back from Elba!

Gaspard had no time to worry about what they were saying in England or Russia or the other neighboring countries. For him it meant the fulfillment of Béranger's prophecy. It meant that justice was returning. And above all it had meant that his father was set at liberty. That was two months ago. But they still had to nurse their father, who was ill and subject to fits of coughing.

The third day after Napoleon entered Paris, while the boulevards were invaded by joyful crowds from the slums, Gaspard set off for St. Cloud. It was a Sunday as it had been the last time.

What rejoicings everywhere! Workmen and artisans were fraternizing with the soldiers. Napoleon's portrait everywhere—hundreds of them! It was astonishing that so many had escaped the vigilance of the Bourbon police and the prying eyes of informers.

But at St. Cloud things were not so merry as they had been last time; there was work going on now. A dozen couriers stood ready in the courtyard; officers hurried in and out unceasingly; the place felt like G.H.Q. before a battle.

It was several hours before Gaspard Debureau succeeded by various pretexts in reaching the inner corridor and from it the great anteroom behind whose doors a council of state was ending. A great many other petitioners were there. A gentleman in a

black suit, with ribbons and orders on his breast, quietly asked each one the reason of his visit.

"I wanted to speak to His Majesty," said Gaspard when it came to his turn.

"You must tell me what about."

"My father was imprisoned because the Emperor's portrait was found at his house. I've come to ask for mercy."

The gentleman in black asked the name, made a few notes, bowed kindly, and went on to the next petitioner. When he had finished and was preparing to leave, he came up to Gaspard again.

"I think the Emperor would be pleased to see me," said Gaspard appealingly and at the same time proudly. He did not know how else to express it. But the gentleman only smiled, bowed again and went out.

There was another hour or more to wait. Then presently the gentleman in black came out again, looked through his notes carefully and went over to the questioners, petitioners, delegates. Some he told to come back in a week's time, others he sent to some other department of the Government, some he refused or gave hopes of a decision at some later date. He reached Gaspard.

"An amnesty for all political prisoners has just been signed." And he crossed out his note.

Yes, his father would be free now, but Gaspard longed to speak to the Emperor. He would be so proud to tell him how he and his father had suffered for his sake. He wanted him to know how a poor clown had remembered his few words of kindness and friendliness. An amnesty— Things would be all right.

When he was moving regretfully to the door to go out, the door of the inner room suddenly flew open, a word of command rang out, and Napoleon strode through with his rapid step. A group of officers followed him. Everyone stood to attention, the men took off their hats but did not bow their heads. Everyone stared at him, everyone wanted to see him again.

Then Gaspard Debureau did something which needed more courage than anything else that he had ever done in his life. He took a long step and stood in the Emperor's path.

Napoleon turned his head. One of the officers took Gaspard by the arm and drew him aside, but Napoleon stood still with his eyes fixed on Debureau's face.

"How he has aged!" Gaspard thought to himself, returning his gaze. His expression was so worn and worried, there was a

frosty gleam in his eyes, his cheeks were sunk and his forehead furrowed. Gaspard was sorry for him.

Napoleon did not smile. He slightly closed one eye and said with a question in his voice:

"Actor?"

"Yes, Sire," cried Gaspard joyfully, nodding his head.

"Debureau," said Napoleon slowly, as he recalled the name.

"Yes, Sire!" cried Gaspard again; at that moment he would cheerfully have walked on a rope across the deepest abyss in the world.

"Your father shall be set free," said Napoleon quietly.

"Thank you, Sire." Debureau bowed and added joyfully: "The common people remained faithful to you, Sire!"

At that a little smile seemed to cross the Emperor's face for the first time, but vanished again in the worried, careworn expression. He raised his hand as if to put it on Gaspard's arm, but halfway he stopped and only said without special emphasis:

"Let this be an example to you, Debureau, never to lose courage!" He raised two fingers in greeting, bowed his head and went out.

"Thank you, Sire!" died on Gaspard's lips. The group of people round him rushed up to slap him on the back and ask him where he had known the Emperor, what he had said to him, and how he came to know him at all.

"The Emperor has a marvelous memory," was all that Debureau said as he watched him going out.

He had seen the Emperor for the last time.

It was the bourgeois who among them overthrew Napoleon, rather than his enemies at Waterloo. Paris was weary and frightened; she longed for luxury, not for fresh adventures which were a matter of life and death. The Hundred Days passed in alternate rejoicings and murmurs of discontent, hopes and fears, joy and sorrow. Too late Napoleon took the advice of the young actor whom he had driven to St. Cloud. Now at the last moment he was trying to improve the state of the common people and make them his mainstay, overwhelm them with liberties and institutions; but it was too late. The gold-laced coats and aristocratic shoes would not yield. And then yet another fierce power rose against Napoleon, one of which Debureau had never thought, nor anyone else who was faithful to him: this power was the million dead. They rose and stood in the way of his new advance, warn-

ing, exhorting, and would not give way an inch. And they won. June brought the solution.

The Allies were celebrating their second conquest of Paris. She welcomed them like a harlot, indifferent to who possesses her provided she has hope of gain. And this time she had useful experience behind her: she knew what her guests liked, she knew what to put on, what to sing to them, how to welcome them, as they marched in—the regiments of dragoons threading through the city like streams of gold which separated and flowed away into the theaters, the taverns and the gambling rooms. All the girls who did not think that orange blossom would exactly suit them rejoiced. So did all the girls in the glove shops, and modistes and laundresses. Every officer needed an expensive looking mistress to add to his magnificence; the luster of medals, orders and epaulettes was not enough. Anyone who had a mistress must have a box at the theater as well and sup Chez Véry. The gaming rooms had a gold time and the jewelers were sold out. They were forty fat days. It was whispered that the Czar Alexander spent half a million roubles during that time, but that was nothing compared with Marshal Blücher, who spent three million. Paris passed on the news delightedly from mouth to mouth. Impoverished France was able to put them in her pocket, a fact which was not forgotten.

Other things were whispered, but only in the quiet working-class quarters where no one knew what all the rejoicing was about. It was said that Napoleon had tried to poison himself, but that the poison, which he carried in a ring, failed to act; that when he bade farewell to his faithful grenadiers at Fontainebleau he had kept his grief in check until the review was finished, but had broken down and wept when he kissed the standard of his guards for the last time, and all his old comrades of his fiercest battles had wept with him. Finally, that the English were going to imprison him all alone on some rock called St. Helena which no one had ever heard of and from which he would never be able to escape.

"And are they going to leave him to die there?" Gaspard asked anxiously of the people who were talking about it.

"Hush!" they said when they thought he spoke too loud.

Once more he might not be spoken of. Everything changed again, like a game of roulette: evens—odds—and evens again. Evens were the white standards, cockades and plumes, evens were the restitution of the Bourbon appointments and the suppression

of all liberties. There was a general cry for vengeance. Marie Antoinette's daughter, the Duchess d'Angoulême, to whom people had long looked up respectfully as the "orpheline du Temple," demanded revenge. So did a hundred other dukes and duchesses. These cravings had to be satisfied; the prisons filled up again.

Monsieur Godet appeared once more on the scene in the Rue St. Maur. He had lost his wife somewhere and had become a professional informer and blackmailer. From time to time he tried shouting "Away with the Bourbons!" at the corner of the street. Anyone who let himself be led away by it was lost; he was arrested before he had gone a dozen steps. Because he could not forgive the elder Dvorjak for depriving him of a good wage, he set the police on him again; and this time he did not have to go about it secretly. The devil only knew where he had crawled away during the Hundred Days.

It was in vain that Dvorjak pleaded his illness, which was rapidly growing worse. He coughed almost unceasingly and his chest rattled and wheezed. But that did not help him; he was arrested and imprisoned with greater rigor than before. But it was his destiny that misfortune should always come to him hand in hand with a happy chance: the first time Etienne went off to Belgium where he now was a riding master with at least seventy horses under his control. This time it was the golden-haired Dorothy.

There were a large number of Poles with the Russian soldiers and among them was a certain colonel, Count Dobrovsky. One evening he visited the circus and the enchanting, lovely horsewoman attracted him. He paid her a visit; but Dorothy had a father and a Christian upbringing. However, she smiled very sweetly at the count, accepted his roses, but refused to sup with him. She did this several times in spite of the fact that Colonel Dobrovsky was a most charming man, under forty and not one of the eternally intoxicated young fools who went shouting along the boulevards that Paris was theirs. It went on for about a week, and then they said good-by, as Count Dobrovsky was leaving Paris with his regiment. He was expecting to go home to his estates in Poland, and assured Dorothy before he left that he would often think of her. She was sad all the evening and all the next week. She went through her turn at the circus without a smile; but it broke out all the more radiantly when she jumped down after the show was over and fell straight into her lover's arms. His regiment was stationed a couple of miles outside Paris;

the young count had thought things over and come back for his bride.

Dorothy's father had been in prison about a week when this happened, but Madeleine was there. What mother would not have consented to her daughter's marriage when it meant casting off the rags in which she had lived for twenty years and becoming a countess? And the Dvorjaks really each did as they liked; four of them had parted from the family to seek their fortunes, and had prospered. Only Gaspard remained a nobody, unfit for anything.

Count Dobrovsky even shook hands with Gaspard and ordered a sumptuous supper to be sent in to Madeleine, but he took Dorothy to stay with him at a hotel. They decided that they would do their most necessary shopping early next morning and then ride back to rejoin the regiment immediately; Dorothy would go back with the count to her new home. But she stipulated that Gaspard should come and let her know how their father was, so that she could set off with an easier mind.

Dvorjak was getting worse, Gaspard learned from the gaoler and his wife. Diab!e! how could it be otherwise in these cold cells when he shivered even in a warm bed? Gaspard did not know where to go for help; his one friend was on his way to a lonely rock. Of all the people who stared at him as he shook with terror on his tightrope, not one was his friend. He was alone and his father was dying.

As the count and Dorothy drove to the hotel in a carriage full of flowers and strangely sweet happiness, Gaspard stuffed a hunk of bread into his pocket and set off for the prison of Bicêtre.

It was almost midnight. The prison was closed, of course, and there was no hope of getting inside; the one hope was that one of the gaolers might be in the tavern and get back late. So he waited. It was an unpleasant prospect. April that year was as cold and rainy as November; the air condensed in a chilly mist.

Gaspard stood for a while near the gate, peering anxiously at the sentry who seemed to be asleep; then he walked around the high walls to warm himself. The night was deserted.

Suddenly, however, a light flickered in the passage and a moment later a key grated in the lock. Gaspard hurried to the gate. A young man with a bundle of papers came out, said something to the guard who had unlocked the door for him; both men laughed and then the door closed once more. Gaspard came

hurrying up just at the moment that the lock clicked. He knocked on the door several times; the guard asked what he wanted, and Gaspard stammered his question. But the man on the other side of the door only cursed at him and then his steps could be heard clattering along a corridor and a door slammed. Gaspard leaned his forehead despairingly against the iron-bound wooden door.

"What's the matter?" a young voice asked him.

"Heartless brutes!" said Gaspard.

"Who have you got in there?" the young man asked again; it was the same man who had come out a few minutes before. Gaspard turned, but he did not look the stranger in the face.

"My father's in prison," he said.

"What's he done?"

"Nothing."

"No?" smiled the young man. "And what are you trying to do here? Pull down the prison, eh?"

"Father's ill," said Gaspard angrily. "I wanted to ask how he is."

"If he's ill, they've certainly put him in the hospital."

"Yes, but no one's looking after him."

"How do you know?"

"I *do* know."

The strange young man shrugged his shoulders and turned back to the entrance. Just as Debureau realized that he should have been more polite to him and asked his advice, the young man turned and came back to him.

"Do you want to ask after your father?"

"Yes, Monsieur," Gaspard answered readily. The stranger considered a minute, then he shook his head.

"It can't be done now, they're all asleep. In the morning."

"Monsieur, my sister's going away in the morning. I wanted to give her news of him."

"What are you?" asked the young man.

"An actor," said Gaspard boldly.

"Look here. I'm a lawyer. I've been seeing a client who goes before the judge tomorrow. I'm fond of theater folk. It's almost one now and they open at five. Come and have a glass of wine with me and when it's time I'll go back with you and help you to see your father."

"Will you really?" cried Gaspard, astonished.

"Why not? I know the governor."

"That's splendid. Father will be pleased—and I shall be able

to give the news to my sister in time. Of course it means I shan't go to bed . . ." he broke off.

"Will it be the first time you've been up all night?"

"Yes, Monsieur," answered Gaspard, forgetting the nights that he had lain awake in the woods.

"An actor?" asked the lawyer wonderingly.

"Father's ill, there's my mother at home," explained Gaspard guiltily.

"Well, come along with me now," said the young man. Gaspard, who was quick at sizing up people, could tell from his voice that he was pleased, or at least relieved, not to be alone.

"Where shall we go?"

Gaspard did not know, he only knew a couple of low taverns in his own neighborhood.

"We'll go to mère Cadet," decided the lawyer.

It was not far away, in the Rue du Maine. Although it was after midnight the place was very lively. Gaspard was very glad that the lawyer had not taken him to some grand restaurant where he would not have known what to do with his hands. Here the company was bad rather than good; there were two tables full of wagon drivers playing dice; at another was a young man with long hair—a painter! thought Gaspard—with a crowd of young women, all cheerful and laughing. The other people there Gaspard could not place in any profession.

"You get them all here," said the lawyer as they took their seats at a table and he noticed his companion's inquisitive glance. "Singing girls from the Théâtre Montparnasse, lovers of Nicolet and the Bobino, and scribblers from all the neighborhood. It's usually quite lively here."

Gaspard mentally took back his judgment that the company was not elevated. Bobino, Montparnasse were first-class theaters to which he timidly raised his eyes when he walked past under their notices.

"Which theater are you from?" Gaspard's host asked next.

"I?" Gaspard was startled. Should he lie? The young lawyer, hardly thirty years old, attracted him so much with his smooth fair hair, brushed back, but now and then falling forward on to his forehead, his sad eyes and confiding lips. No, he could not pretend to him. "I'm a tightrope walker," he said quietly.

"What?"

"Shall I go away?" asked Gaspard frankly.

The lawyer smiled.



"Not at all, I'm delighted to have supper with a tightrope dancer, it's something that's never happened to me before. But believe me, I enjoy that kind of performance very much, especially at night, by torchlight." He called the waitress. "Do you mind if I order something? I don't like wine by itself." The waitress bent over the table with a smile. "Ragout de lapin aux choux," the lawyer gave the order. "It's their specialty," he explained to Gaspard.

"Nothing else?" asked the waitress with a smile.

"Yes, of course. White wine will go excellently with it." The waitress laughed, and turning to Gaspard she stroked his cheek. The boy turned scarlet.

"Monsieur cooks his own lobsters," chuckled the girl and hurried away.

"So you still blush," asked the lawyer wonderingly. "That's charming. Don't you like girls?"

"I think I do," Gaspard answered as truthfully as he could.

"Then you can take your choice."

"You need money for that."

"Nonsense! A youngster like you doesn't need money."

"I'm not handsome," said Gaspard.

"Ah—that's all—all—immaterial." The lawyer meant to speak gaily, but the words sounded strange.

He has a hidden love, thought Gaspard.

The waitress brought the food and wine and left them again; this time she pressed the hand of the fair-haired lawyer. The two companions began their supper.

"Are you fond of poetry?" the lawyer asked suddenly.

"I'm fond of songs," Gaspard replied.

"May I read you something?"

"Do!" nodded Gaspard.

His companion considered with downcast eyes. It's strange, thought Gaspard, that I only make friends with sad people. I seem to have all the sadness in the world already. Or is everybody really sad? But his companion took a deep draught of wine and laughed.

"Do help my memory, please! Have we told each other our names yet?"

"I'm afraid not. I didn't dare . . ."

"What's your name, brother artist, quick!"

"Gaspard Debureau."

The name conveyed nothing to his host.

"My name's Eugène Hugo."

"Eugène Hugo!" cried Gaspard.

"Well?" The lawyer grew serious. And Gaspard told him of the meeting of the two boys outside Marseilles, which Eugène Hugo had forgotten.

But upon one thing they were agreed, and they drank to the inscrutable ways of Fate.

Morning found them tired and drained of energy by the night's enforced merrymaking. They were not alone in the tavern, but they were more than alone. After the first joyous moment of recognition Gaspard had begun to grasp the fact that the world of Eugène Hugo was completely strange to him. He sat silent, listening. From Eugène's remarks he gathered first and foremost that he was unhappy because he was unsuccessful in spite of all his efforts. He read Gaspard some poems which he could not understand. He argued enthusiastically about the beauty of a single passion.

"Are you capable of a great passion? One to which you would sacrifice all?"

Debureau did not know. He had suffered so much misery, cruelty and pain in his life that he really could not think of anything which could humiliate, crush or disappoint him more than had been done already. "How's your brother?" he remembered suddenly. "That jolly little boy."

"He's not getting on very well just now. He lives with our mother; our father's dead. I help them a bit. Victor—Victor writes poetry too. Oh, I should just say so—Victor!" Eugène was jealous of his brother. His mother loved him more than Eugène and would sacrifice everything for him.

Two girls came and sat with them for a little while, singers from the Latin Quarter, but there was nothing romantic about ~~them~~; they talked politics, as everyone else was doing in the tavern and all over Paris. Painters unfolded strategic plans on the theme "If I Were Emperor." Actresses were sure of the next political move. There was plenty to talk about: the new laws which ignored the will of the people and set up a police dictatorship; the freedom of the press and of assembly vanished into the air like bursting bubbles. But what offended these young, free-thinking people most was the domination of the Church. The Jesuits had begun to take the bit between their teeth unpunished; the King let them have their head. Their church councils had

just invented a new crime: disturbing the Sabbath peace; this was punished with long terms of imprisonment.

"You see them?" Eugène pointed to the people round them. "Can the present regime last long among such people?"

Gaspard confided to him his bitter knowledge of the venality of the upper-class Parisians.

"It's all one to them. They're for whoever gives them most."

"That's only partly true. There's something more than that in Paris. There's always an opposition. There was the case of the revolution, when the opposition murdered each other till they were almost exterminated. France is suffering from that, certainly. But the principle is sound: for every 'yes' uttered by half the country there's always someone with the courage to say 'no!' That's what keeps France alive."

"But to have king and emperor turn and turn about—and all the while to be smiling gaily and sipping a glass of wine?"

"All right, Debureau, you rush off and make an attack on Bicêtre! Pull down the King's palace! Will you succeed in proving anything? We are divided into two sides, aren't we? Are we to start murdering each other again? No. The royalists aren't strong, but they have foreign support. France must play at being a good little girl. Every liberal knows that he wouldn't be serving the country by stirring up trouble. So he prefers to endure the royalist rule. France is still France. She knows that if there were any sign of movement here the English and Blücher would be here in the twinkling of an eye. So we must wait—those who believe must wait. It will come. You'll see, Debureau, it'll come in our time."

They talked of these and many other things. And there were long silences during which Eugène would make some strange remark and give as a toast "roses" and then "the stars." Although Gaspard was in the habit of conversing with the night and its mysteries, he did not understand Eugène and began to think of his father.

By morning he was filled with uneasiness and could hardly wait till Eugène had paid and they had tumbled out of the tavern where the waitress had been relieved and the early morning wagon drivers burst in and ousted the last groups of actors and painters.

Outside the mist had cleared and the sun rose over the prison after a long spell of dull weather. Spring was coming. Tired and

dry-lipped, but in a cheerful humor the two young men came to the prison.

Eugène rang the bell. When the door was opened he showed his papers and both were admitted. He led Gaspard through long passages. He had to show his papers twice more before they reached another barred entrance to a wing with the notice: Hospital.

Gaspard wanted to find the gaoler's wife, whom he knew, but Eugène considered this unnecessary. He gave his name at the governor's office and asked there; they were told the number of the ward. Gaspard was trembling with impatience; he was longing to see his father and glad that his father would see that they were troubling about him and had not forgotten him; he hurried to the door. An elderly nurse was just coming out.

"Who are you looking for?" she asked.

"My father," answered Gaspard. "Jan Dvorjak."

The nurse nearly burst out laughing.

"Well I never! You might have hurried a bit more!"

"We want to visit him," said Eugène. The nurse clapped her hands.

"But the man's been dead for ages!"

Eugène looked at Gaspard. Gaspard was incredulous.

"It's not true!"

"It is!"

"When did he die? They only brought him here yesterday afternoon. They told me so."

"Yes, and he died yesterday. He's been lying in the chapel for hours." And she walked away shaking her head, unable to understand what tricks they were up to—coming to visit a dead man. But she turned back and said in an undertone: "It was madness to lock him up. He had congestion of the lungs."

Gaspard did not cry; he seemed still unable to believe it. His father dead? No. Why, he wasn't a bit prepared for it. And yesterday—while they were actually celebrating Dorothy's wedding. When he set out for the prison, his father had already been carried into the chapel. And his night in the tavern had been all for nothing; he had eaten and drunk—and the waitress had stroked his cheek—and all that time his father was lying in a stone cold chapel. Congestion of the lungs! And in spite of that they had put him in prison! Monsieur Godet and the others. Monsieur Godet and Monsieur Louis XVIII, the one a greater scoundrel than the other. They had murdered his father between them.

"Gaspard, mon ami," Eugène roused him from his thoughts, "come along, let's go." Gaspard took the offered hand. "Do you want to see your father?"

"No," said Gaspard softly, "I want to think of him—"

"That's right," said Eugène and went back to the office again. He soon returned. "It's true. He died quietly and painlessly at eight o'clock. He's to be buried tomorrow."

"Where?"

"In the graveyard here."

"Thank you."

They left the prison. In the streets there were people, smells, noise. But to Gaspard everything seemed quite different now. He had changed and everything had changed with him. He had lost his father.

"You were very kind to me last night," he murmured as he pressed Hugo's hand.

"It was a small matter." Eugène smiled sympathetically like a comrade. "If ever you need anything, I live at the corner of the Rue du Maine, a red house. Do come."

"Thank you again. Perhaps some day . . ."

"I shall be glad to see you. If it comforts you a little," he added slowly and with some hesitation, "tell yourself that you have lost a father today, but found—a friend—"

He bowed and left him. Gaspard stared after him gratefully.

It was beautiful! But the worst task was still before him. The message to Dorothy!

Rue de Monorgeuil. Hôtel d'Orléans. Does Count Dobrovsky lived here? Yes. May I speak to him? I'll ask. Come with me. And now he goes up the stairs. It's getting worse and worse. Stairs. Door. Entrez!

He entered the large vestibule. It was a splendid hotel, certainly very expensive. Dorothy has been lucky and is going to live in comfort. He wished her everything good. She was always the kindest. She never beat him when he was little. She had the kindest heart of all.

Doesn't she deserve something in return for it?

Dorothy came running in, wearing a lovely morning dress. She looked like a water nymph in her green muslin and with her golden hair. She took Gaspard by the arm.

"How's Father? Tell me, Gaspard, tell me! Is he worse?"

You look so queer . . . You've been crying!" She was alarmed. But Gaspard's face suddenly broadened into a smile.

"My eyes? This isn't from crying," he said cheerfully. "I've been celebrating all night, sweet sister, that's what it is!"

"Young scoundrel! But how is Father?"

"Heaps better," said Gaspard, smiling. "More than better—sound as a bell. The climate of the prison suits him. He's looking forward to coming home."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Gaspard, you don't know how glad I am."

"Of course you are, so am I."

"I couldn't have gone away if he'd been ill. Who knows when I shall see him again. Please, Gaspard, mind you tell him I didn't want to go away, but my husband—it couldn't be managed any other way—I had to go with him, otherwise I should never get into Poland."

"Father said you're not to worry about that. If he misses you too much he'll come and visit you. And when you have a son . . ." There were tears in Gaspard's eyes.

"Why are you crying?" exclaimed his sister.

"Only because I'm happy, Dorothy. When you have a son, you're to send him to us. Dad will make him a first-class rop dancer."

"He's going to be a colonel," laughed Dorothy. "And don't cry, there's a dear. We shall—we shall see each other again some day. I'll come to Paris when the war's over and everything's settled down. Give my love to them all and if you ever see Etienne or Eva, say I remembered them all before I went away."

"I'll tell them, Dorothy, I promise."

"And give this to Mother—to help till Father gets better—from the count . . . and a bit from me . . ." She gave him a hug.

"Good luck, Dorothy!"

"Good luck! And thank you for the good, good news!"

Gaspard walked down the stairs. He left the Hôtel d'Orléans. He walked slowly along the street. An immense sorrow weighed him down, a double sorrow which he had not shared, but had kept all for himself.

But all the time something within him was shouting for joy, exulting over a strange contentment, a happiness quite above himself. Gaspard strode along the streets feeling richer than the French king. Rich with the gift he had given: happiness instead of pain, laughter instead of tears.

## IX

### THE SECOND FRIENDSHIP

PARIS changed her appearance once more.

Napoleonic relics found their way on the rubbish heap, into the Seine, or into hiding. The glory of the Bourbons crawled out into the light of day.

The same day that Jan Dvorjak was simply buried, while Gaspard, supporting his mother, laid a few spring violets on the hastily dug grave, the remains of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were exhumed with many honors in the cemetery of Montmartre, and reburied no less ceremoniously with all the glory due to them.

The reactionaries believed that this time they had insured against all dangers and decided in the general interest to imprison anyone having any connection with the spirit of revolution. They easily found pretexts and their agents provocateurs were well trained. In some towns, riots were organized with the help of crowds of hired ruffians, and under the pretext of the disturbance the authorities punished the victims whom they had been tracking down. A few unfortunates from Gaspard's neighborhood got into trouble this way, but Gaspard had learned to see through the trick and did not let himself be taken in. His only education for some years had been what he picked up in the streets of Paris, but it proved its use now. He had not yet learned to dominate a crowd, but he could tell the difference between an honest crowd and a hired one.

During the next few days he was little affected by the bonfires at every crossroad in which the thoughts of Lemenais and Chateaubriand were burned to ashes. The only book which he had ever bought was a cheap copy of Béranger's "Songs." The pages were alive and he devoured them eagerly. For the rest he looked on books as something like expensive boxes at the Opéra; one more or less did not matter to him.

It was different with Béranger. His songs jumped down from the pages, bristling, dancing, flying. And now especially, when speech was not free and things might not be called by their

right names, these songs were a gift straight from heaven. You simply whistled a refrain and your man understood what you meant. Or you dropped a couple of words, were answered by a couple more, and contact was established.

For the time Gaspard's adoration for Napoleon was shaken. He heard on all sides of his cruelty, selfishness and narrowness. The evil that men do lives after them. Why make enemies and do mutual injury fighting about his merits? After all, Napoleon could not defend himself. So he became a lightning conductor for the meanest human hatreds, vague slander and cowardly accusations. In an explosion of hatred, folk denounced the faults of the absent one to disarm criticism of their own.

From the clear-sighted and from the faithful poor came a wave of opposition. They had to be intimidated. So one morning Marshal Ney was executed.

After that people ceased to speak of Bonaparte, but he grew all the more to be a secret symbol. Though he was absent, he led. If he might not be spoken of, at least folk might sing innocent ballads.

Gaspard Debureau would lounge with the troupes in courtyards, under bridges and at street corners, and would softly murmur with the singer:

"Parlez-nous de lui, grand'mère . . ."

A policeman came along, but no one moved. He stood listening and then walked on. Nothing offensive there.

And young lads in the slums sang, their eyes misty with joy and tears:

"Parlez-nous de LUI, grand'mère . . ."

Debureau burned with eagerness to fight. He challenged life at every step. His father's death and the departure of all his brothers and sisters left him alone to look after his mother. No one thought of him now; and they had to have food and a roof over their heads.

He looked for work. He tramped Paris from end to end. He longed to make good at last. The sort of work he had done in the little courtyards in the neighborhood seemed to him too simple. He wanted something—wanted to create, that was the word. To show, to represent something, exert some influence.

He went to see Eugène Hugo.

One holiday they walked together the whole length of the Boulevard du Temple, where the amusements of the common



people of Paris were crowded side by side. The gentry did not come here; but great and small came in from the slums to be cheered up. They came to forget their work and their sorrows. Streams of people flocked along jostling each other; gaiety was in the air. Adventure beckoned on all sides. Raucous invitations were yelled, shooting galleries crackled with rifle fire like the front lines; everyone who was not actually drinking was laughing and singing. Strong men in tights exhibited their muscles, threw out their chests and bent nails with their fingers. Beside them ballet girls pirouetted, their tinsel crowns and spangled skirts lost their shabbiness in the twilight and won a red gold luster from the smoky torches. The stench of wild beasts in the menagerie mingled with the smell of cheap perfumes; there was an atmosphere of make-believe and merriment.

An announcement attracted them: Performing Dogs' Theater. They went down about ten steps underground into a low and fairly large room. Two rows of boxes, a wide stage. Torches and large candles burned round the stage and behind them. A number of people were sitting on the low forms, laughing and slapping their knees. The place reeked of sweat, smoke, tallow, onions, and a dozen other things. The more exacting spectators would not have ventured there.

Real dogs were walking about on the stage. Debureau had never seen anything like it. He had seen dogs jump through hoops, but not act plays; here they came on the stage dressed in magnificent costumes, serious, important, indifferent. A count and countess wore powdered perukes, silken costumes, lace on their shirts, cravats, shoes. The master was followed by a servant dressed as a jockey, who held an umbrella over him. Then a soldier and a deserter appeared: they acted a scene in which the soldier arrested the deserter and took him before a court martial. Several soldiers pronounced the death penalty; there was a shot like a thunderclap and the unfortunate deserter staggered, fell, moved a paw, and lay motionless. Curtain.

"Dumb-show," smiled Gaspard.

"D'you want to go and act with them?"

They went out with the smiling crowd. Here one could forget both king and emperor, get drunk with merriment—the merriment of others if not one's own. It was a parade of cheery faces.

Suddenly Eugène stopped one of the passersby and greeted him.

"Monsieur Clément Longval."

"Monsieur Gaspard Debureau."

They decided to go to a café. There were ten within a few yards. A l'Arbre Sec the first of them was called. Its dusty red floor was covered with cigar ends, the air was full of tobacco smoke; the mirrors round the walls only reflected in their upper halves, the lower parts were dull and cracked.

Gaspard was able to study his new acquaintance. Monsieur Clément Longval was older than Eugène. He had a more distinguished, manlier face and finer features. While Eugène was excitable and showed it in his eyes, Longval had a steadier gaze which spoke of inward balance. If Eugène's speech was like a nimble clarinet, Longval's was like the tones of a 'cello: he was quiet, calm, thoughtful. Gaspard liked him better than Eugène at first glance. If anyone spoke to him he stopped talking at once and listened attentively. He seemed always retreating into the background, afraid of showing himself in too bright a light. Only from time to time a smile escaped him when the memory of something lovely was too strong for him and drove away other thoughts.

"Tell us something entertaining, Longval! We've just been at a very sad execution and we need cheering up," said Eugène.

Gaspard did not know why Longval started so violently and gave Eugène such a queer look. It was only much later that he found out why the words had startled him so. But Eugène's face was candid, and contained nothing but curiosity.

"Something has happened to me, Messieurs, which only happens to people in Monsieur Pistois' novels."

"Oho!" cried Eugène, "it's turned out that your father's a count!"

"No!"

"Have you found a buried treasure? Or is your mother really your own sister?"

"No, no. Perhaps even Monsieur Pistois would not have invented anything so improbable. Didn't I once tell you, Eugène, about a little girl whom I loved?"

"Immoral man!" exclaimed Eugène. "You never told me anything about it."

"I was nine at the time. My mother and I lived at Villeforte and I had a charming romance with a little girl—younger than I was—all the hills round about belonged to us . . ."

"You don't mean you've met her again?"

"Yes. Last night."

"Why, but man . . ." Eugène objected. "You're—I mean—what does Madame Emilie say to it all?"

"Madame Emilie introduced her to me herself."

"And love flamed up anew?"

"I think so."

"But what part is Madame Emilie going to play in this impressive spectacle?"

"An unusually generous one," smiled Longval. "As perhaps you know, Madame Emilie is not a woman from whom one could part in anger. She understood and seems to have found a solution to spare me pain. We shall certainly be good friends still."

"Congratulations, Longval."

"Don't you think it's Fate?"

"If it's beautiful, then it's Fate," decided Eugène.

"And Monsieur Debureau?" Longval turned politely to him.

"Monsieur Debureau," Eugène answered for him, "has the easiest time with Fate. If he meets someone from his youth, it'll only be a slightly tipsy lawyer. Otherwise Fate's lying low with him."

"Monsieur Debureau is . . . ?"

"An actor. A pantomimist. He's just been to apply for a job in a company of performing dogs, but he had no luck."

Eugène's irony went home with Gaspard.

"I'm fond of the stage," said Longval, smiling at Gaspard. "Do you like books?"

"Yes," said Gaspard, ashamed.

"If you'd care to come for a stroll with me some time—I always have a couple of books in my pockets—we could have a chat about literature. I'm not inviting Eugène, he only has superficial fancies."

"But Eugène writes poetry!" objected Gaspard.

"Of course he does!" smiled Longval.

This time it was Eugène who seemed hurt.

"I was only joking," Longval pacified him. "I'm looking forward to your first book and shall be the first to congratulate you on it." They rose. "Now, Monsieur Debureau, if you care to, I live— No, no. I'm always at the principal entrance to the Tuileries at ten o'clock—if that suits you any day . . ." He held out his hand; when Debureau put his into it, Longval quoted:

" . . . Paillasse mon ami,  
Saute pour tout le monde!"

Debureau clasped Longval's hand firmly. And even after Longval had gone, he still smiled quietly to himself. The world had become beautiful again. He had found a second friend. What wealth, when one is twenty!

Was it a real friendship?

Possibly neither Eugène Hugo nor Clément Longval would have called it so; it may have been only the first step of that human relationship, but for Gaspard it meant a great deal. It was one of the beauties of life. In spite of all the pain which life had made him suffer, in spite of all the hardness and ill will which he had met in the very place where he had expected tenderness, Gaspard had a great capacity for affection. Kicked about in his childhood, like a stone in somebody's path, he felt within himself a great emptiness, a place for all the tenderness which he had never known. He loved his father in retrospect, forgiving him for cruelty and beatings; he only remembered his care and his forthrightness in the interest of his family. He remembered his bleeding fingers long ago when he pulled the cart out of the mud, the look on his face when he pushed his food away from him, declaring that he had had enough, so that his children could eat it up. It is true that very little of it had come Gaspard's way: but his father had been right even there—a good-for-nothing like him!

But that had not been the right way to treat him. He was capable of devoting his whole being to someone who would give him a kind look and a loving word. He had learned to hate and he had learned to love passionately. Every night before he went to sleep he remembered: "Don't forget Godet!" That account should be settled some day. He murdered my father, Gaspard told himself. For a hateful act he could revenge himself ten times more hatefully, but for proved goodness he could be grateful with a tenfold gratitude. He longed pitifully for kindness, tenderness. He knew no greater good in life than mutual kindness.

Thus Eugène remained more or less of a stranger to him. He could not fail to see that the young lawyer was a little ashamed of him; he was willing to sit with him in the corner of a tavern, but did not care to walk through the streets with him.

He never noticed anything of the sort with Clément Longval, though he was more stylishly dressed than Eugène. Longval did not consider such things important. When they met and walked slowly along the broad walks of the Tuileries, he could

forget his shabby clothes and worn shoes. He would almost have dared to say that they fitted each other like twin souls.

Friendship was the bridge by which Gaspard crossed to the more spiritual side of human life. From the intimacy with Longval and the attachment to him sprang a longing to equal him, understand him, approach him as closely as possible. He had a great deal of ground to make up. If he could read at all it was due to his mother and later Dorothy, who had condescended to him now and then. Life had taught him by the direct method; if he was not quick enough, blows followed at once. And certainly a man who travels through ten foreign countries, even in his childhood, acquires a certain natural intelligence.

So Gaspard had learned to read people, not books.

"You've been lucky to find me," Clément told him. "I'm so much alone myself that I'm glad to be able to talk about it."

"Why don't you write poetry, novels . . . ?"

"Literature? Hélas, I tried but it was no good."

"And now?"

"Now—now I shall probably become a diplomatic official," Clément replied uncertainly.

There was a great deal left vague or merely hinted at when Clément spoke of his private life; usually he avoided the subject.

"Bad terms with the family," he excused himself sometimes, at other times he was silent or quickly turned the conversation another way.

Each time they met he had a different book in the pocket of his elegant brown overcoat: Vergil, Catullus, but also Corneille, Racine, even Beaumarchais and Rabelais. Step by step Gaspard penetrated into a new world. He did not remember the names, he only learned to see the world as a more colorful and lively thing than hitherto.

"Look, a leaf has fallen," he would have said once, if he had noticed such a self-evident and ordinary thing at all.

Now he was able to see more. His eyes told him of the unhealthy and beautiful tatter of red color which was fluttering through the air. His spirit could feel the moment when the cold separated the stem from the twig, and silent passage of the leaf to the faded grass.

He did not simply divide folk into good and bad. He wanted to get below the surface of the outward likeness of each person whom he met; to get underneath, where there was suffering, con-

tentment, all sorts of secrets. He learned to appreciate people more.

"I should like to hear something about you now." Longval turned to him.

"Me?"

He had obviously been through more than most young men of his age, but perhaps just because there was so much of it, none of it seemed to him exceptionally important. He had had no single tremendous experience; all his life had been one long, dangerous dance on a tightrope above an abyss; no one jump had been different from the others, and if it had he did not know how to talk about it.

"I never had anyone much to talk to—my father and brothers did not take much notice of me—I hadn't any friends of my own age—I've just forgotten how to talk!"

"I understand," said Longval. "You've never been sure of yourself, never been clear who you really are, so you've always been more of a spectator than an actor in your own life."

"Something like that," admitted Gaspard.

"If a man is to live as his nature urges him, he needs to disregard others completely. One has parents, customs, tradition—But you're alone now, Gaspard, you'll be able to make your own life."

"But I don't know what my gifts are or whether I have any. No one wants me. I should like—I should like to act plays, but I don't know how."

"Come here." Clément pulled him behind a bush. "Act something for me. Recite something. What do you know?"

"To recite? Nothing."

"Haven't you ever studied anything, even at the theater?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen Talma at least ten times."

"And?"

"I was carried away."

"Play me one of his scenes."

"One of his scenes!"

"What did you like him best in?"

"'Othello.'"

"Well, go on, then—I'm waiting."

Gaspard looked round helplessly.

"But the words—the words . . . I don't know the words!"

"Mon Dieu! make them up then! There lies your wife—she's deceived you—or at least you think she has—you go up to her

... Act, man! Act!" Clément leaned against a tree and proceeded to take the part of the audience.

Gaspard threw his coat over his shoulder, and came forward slowly. The words, the words! Where had they gone? His memory hunted for them in vain. He would act it without words. There by the bush lay his unfaithful wife. There was hatred in Othello's face. He caught sight of her and it excited him. A few swift steps—now he could see her face. He saw it quite clearly. How peacefully she was breathing—the little face, the calm lips. His face softened, his lips twitched with emotion. He had forgotten why he had come. He leaned over her eyes and his shadow fell on her. That startled him. Whose shadow was that? He remembered. The sweet, contented mouth was a pretense. Her lips belonged to someone else. Her whole body had been given—Hatred broke out afresh and filled every line of his face. His wife—in another man's arms. How many times—how many times? His whole body trembled with humiliation and rage as if in a fever. Didn't she belong to me? Isn't it a sin? A terrible thought shot through his head like lightning. Othello was horrified at it himself and hid his face in his arm. He was afraid to raise his eyes, afraid lest the thought should win. Better go away—away—A resolute step backwards, but the second step wavers, that can be seen even through his cloak—But not while she's asleep! Happy and glowing in another man's arms. The picture tortured him. A stab of nausea and humiliation shot through his body. Revenge! Revenge! His hand—my God, his hand has found his dagger already. And now he is being led by a power outside himself. He is not making steps of his own will, something within him is issuing orders, someone leads him to the bed. You can almost see the invisible hand behind his neck. He stands over the lovely face, takes one long look of farewell—farewell—then bends down with the dagger in his hand—a sudden plunge—and now not fierce hatred but anguished pity which twists his face masters all his body, bringing it to its knees. Othello fell, with a face like a statue, not daring to look behind him, and tears were streaming from his eyes. The end.

Gaspard was still on his knees.

Clément went over to him with trembling hands and touched him on the shoulder. Gaspard pulled himself together.

"It was terrible," said Clément.

"I'm sorry. I can't act," whispered Gaspard.

"No, Gaspard, I don't mean that. I don't understand and I don't know what it is, but you seemed to me terrible."

"I couldn't think of a single word," Gaspard apologized.

"Really? I didn't notice," Clément answered truthfully. "I think you have talent."

Gaspard looked at him diffidently.

"Really, believe me. I'm glad I've found you. You must work something up. Don't lose heart."

"Someone else said that to me once," Gaspard remembered.

"I know now what's the matter with you. You look on at your own life because you're a real actor. You don't give yourself to life because you want to give it to acting. Who knows? That may be the case with all theatrical artists. Do you ever want to do something stormy, something wild . . ."

"I should think so! That leap at the German officer when they were leading in the French prisoners. . . ."

"You were younger."

"Not much."

"Would you do it today?"

"Perhaps not."

"Why?"

"I've learned—I don't like saying this, but it's true—I've learned to despise people. I know they're mean and bad. And I know they're for sale."

"Perhaps an actor even needs to know that scorn," said Clément thoughtfully.

They walked home slowly.

"And yet you want to act for these bad and despicable people?"

"Yes," admitted Debureau softly.

"There, you see," smiled Clément Longval. "That means that you believe in them in spite of everything."



X

ON THE STAGE HEAD DOWNWARDS

GASPARD DEBUREAU never forgot the day that the Duc de Berry was killed. It was in mid February, 1820.

Gaspard was to begin acting that day. He had found work with the help of Eugène Hugo, or rather Victor, as he learned later.

By a queer coincidence it was at the theater of performing dogs on which he had once happened by chance. But performing dogs had ceased to be an attraction; their fame dwindled and the manager moved away. Their place was taken by acrobats who were bringing in a new type of performance which they called "acrobatic miming." As Monsieur Denis, the manager of the troupe, said:

"Acrobatic miming is a concession to the public taste. We are acrobats—expert acrobats; we meet the public taste and act a comedy. But our art remains part and parcel of us. Plays for the crowd and acrobatics for art's sake."

But Gaspard Debureau was of a different opinion, even when he was the youngest and newest member of the troupe. Deep down in his heart he had an idea and he would not relinquish it.

"If I were French," he often thought, "I probably should have forgotten it by now, I should have ten new plans one after another. But it's the winding of the rivers of Bohemia and the broad sweep of the plains—that's what's made me so obstinate."

Unfortunately the performance did not give him much opportunity for real acting. It was an insignificant plot, though very clear, in which the characters, besides the simple expression of certain feelings or moods, quietly did their somersaults, salto and cartwheels.

In spite of that, Gaspard was quite beside himself with joy at beginning a real theatrical career at last. The fifteen francs a week which he was promised seemed to him wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

But now the murdered Duc de Berry upset everything and with the pretext of the murder all the remaining liberties which

France still enjoyed were suppressed. No plays were allowed at the theaters. Gaspard would gladly have strangled with his own hands the wretch who thought of that.

But *grâce aux cieux*, the Parisians were angry too. They agreed to the censorship and all the new laws by which Louis made them no better than slaves, but they would not agree to renounce the theater. And as even the King had a few long-sighted advisers, the theaters were opened, and the Parisians streamed in peacefully once more.

Thus the first acrobatic pantomime saw the light of publicity and Gaspard Debureau for the first time entered the stage which meant the world to him.

The performance was a novelty and had a tremendous success with the people of the Boulevard du Temple. Longval came once to see it, but never Eugène. Gaspard did not blame him; it was not a theater for gentlemen from high-class neighborhoods. It was meant for collarless men with red caps on their heads who smoked, spat and laughed, and who were not spoiled by the luxury of plush-lined boxes.

But Eugène continued to initiate his comrade into the life of Paris. True, there were days when he avoided him or when Gaspard found him difficult; but there were days, and especially nights, when he sought him out, carried him off to a café, alternately reading him his poems and telling him his troubles.

Thus Gaspard got to know a number of cafés and restaurants, gaming rooms and dance halls. He also got to know many curious people who would sit with him at table awhile, but whom he never saw again, or who appeared out of the crowd on the boulevard and were swallowed up by it once more. He met social and political reformers, an eccentric who had written books on campanology, a man whose sole occupation was looking for lost property, and another whose profession in life was that of bill posting. He sat with men who had squandered everything they ever had, and with others who had never wasted a sou in their lives.

He did not like going with Eugène to places where they met fashionable people, and Eugène did not like taking him there. A café "*à six sous*" was the right sort of place for Eugène's mood and Gaspard's studies. That was the place to find the people whom he liked: tradesmen who cautiously confided to him their profits and their worries, how the regulations affected them, what were

the conditions of the workmen, whether prices would go up or not; the tailors who abused the button makers and the button makers who abused the tailors; and the fishermen who wrangled jealously as to which of the reserves was the best and the oldest.

They were people, real people of flesh and blood. With aristocrats the heart gets lost under all the silk and lace. It is true that he met a lot of fools at this school of the taverns as well; but he rarely met anyone who could really be called bad. He always disliked the crowds which gathered when something happened in the street—a fallen horse, a man injured, or a husband beating his wife—but when he sat beside one of the crowd, tête à tête, listening to his talk and watching his eyes, he realized that it wasn't cruelty, it was curiosity. When they talked about some accident or happening which had drawn crowds of curious on-lookers, he saw that they were not laughing—they were nearer crying. He recognized in these people the deep-rooted longing to be always seeing something fresh.

"They see something new pop up and they're off after it at once," agreed Eugène.

"No, they're looking for something new in themselves," was Gaspard's opinion.

"A new movement in their own souls?"

"Yes."

"If they have any."

For Eugène these people only existed as a bright-colored background to his own adventure. The milieu attracted him. He led two lives. He would finish his round of the room at Véry's, complete the prescribed number of bows, and then hurry away to Debureau's world, among jugglers, singing girls, and small folk of that sort.

"I quite understand why you don't like les salons, Gaspard. It's mainly the young ladies, isn't it? Brrr! ice and frost! I like poor girls, don't you?"

Gaspard smiled crookedly. As though he had any choice! Even the poorest girl was too rich for him, he only gleaned the leavings of smiles and caresses which fell on them, if ever Eugène invited a girl to their table.

"A faded, graying grisette," Eugène would murmur vaguely. "Is there anything more tender in the world? She hasn't much, but she gives it all. Your young ladies in their muslin dresses think nothing of you. But these other girls do know how to be

grateful." So he bought one for the price of supper, a bottle of wine and a piece of cheap jewelry.

In spite of becoming a real actor Gaspard lacked assurance, and though he was now in direct contact with "actresses" he did not get as far as engaging in a love affair. Clément Longval once asked him where he got the feeling of jealousy which he had acted behind the bush in the Tuileries; what woman had he been thinking of?

"No one. All of them."

It was true. Having none, he loved them all. There were long weeks when he did not think of them, when he lived in dreams of his future as an actor, or was too exhausted by his work to think of anything else. He gave six performances every day and ten on Sundays and holidays. And so it went on day after day. Sometimes he went home drunk with fatigue, not really knowing whether his back was whole or in pieces. Then there were days when every woman whom he met filled him with grief and longing. To walk along the lively boulevard was a minor *via dolorosa*. On these days everything spoke to him of women, reminded him of their faces, each movement of lips or hands increased his fervor of desire and grief at its non-fulfillment. Standing in the wings waiting for his call, he would feel Columbine's skirts brush the back of his hand. That was a great adventure, for Harlequin, Monsieur Denis, watched her like a bulldog and would have broken Debureau's ribs and then thrown him out into the street. When Gaspard acted he watched the women in the audience. If they were fat housewives or ugly market women, he did not look closely, but satisfied himself with a general view of women's eyes and ringlets. But when he left the theater and set eyes on a woman's figure, he followed her and would walk on and on behind her without taking his eyes off her, walking through the same air which she had just passed through and mating his shadow with hers when the moon allowed it. These were the images which he took home to sleep with and to make the night more beautiful.

However wild his longing, he kept his respect for women even in sleep. He regretted that he had not lived a couple of decades earlier when the cult of women was in full flower. He would have been in his element bowing gracefully before the slim form of his chosen lady and offering her a rose, fighting fierce duels to be rewarded by a kiss on his tired cheek which made him the accepted lover!

A touch of this respect was in his attitude to the ladies of his friends. He never met them, because his friends never thought of introducing Gaspard into their own world. But he thought of them with greater reverence than their lovers did and was grieved when one of his friends spoke of the lady of his heart with indifference or scorn.

This was particularly the case with Eugène, and one day he startled Gaspard with the strange exclamation:

"That girl of Longval's is glorious. Really she's wasted on him."

Gaspard stared at him in surprise.

"Suppose I went and flirted with her a little?"

"You can't!"

"We all write poems to Beauty—there she is before me! The girl's bored with him. I've a good mind to go and whisper in her ear."

"That would hurt Clément."

"If it's serious, she'll give me the cold shoulder. If not I shall be successful and that will be its own justification. What d'you say?"

But presently something happened which disturbed Gaspard much more. One evening for fun they went at Eugène's wish to see a fortune teller. It was an exciting experience. After a lot of strange play with a sieve and knives and three jars filled with salt, pepper and oil, she finally came to the cards.

"There is happiness coming to you," she told Eugène. "You will have many troubles and much sorrow, but everything will be all right in the end if you manage to avoid the main evil which is perilously near."

"What kind of evil?" asked Eugène.

"I see a form," said the woman, staring at the cards.

"A woman's?"

"No, a man's. There is a woman behind him. He is hiding her. The man is your danger, you must defend yourself against him at all costs, then you will win the hidden happiness—that's the woman."

Both young men laughed at this when they left the little house in the Rue de Tambour Cassé. But when they were saying good-by they grew serious.

"I must keep an eye open for my approaching danger," remarked Eugène with compressed lips.

"Supposing you don't?" smiled Gaspard.

They separated and did not see each other again for some days.

The little theater where Gaspard acted got a new manager just then and a new name. An attractive young actor Frédéric Lemaître took over the management of the existing company. "Grand Théâtre des Funambules" appeared on the wall above the entrance, and a notice appeared on walls in the neighborhood:

GRAND THEATRE DES FUNAMBULES

TODAY

BY SPECIAL PERMISSION OF THE AUTHORITIES

A SPECIAL PERFORMANCE OF

THE SIEGE OF THE CASTLE

a military and pyrotechnic pantomime with completely new scenery representing a MOUNTAIN CHAIN; numerous changes of scene and costume and weapons for duels à quatre; processions, fanfares, military maneuvers and an EXPLOSION in the final scene.

Performances at 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9 o'clock.

Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, you must see it.

Frédéric Lemaître was a keen-sighted man and had seen that the acrobatic pantomime was losing the interest of the public. He decided to introduce more contents, action and plot into the play. He was therefore presenting "The Siege of the Castle." Debureau, still quite unknown, gladly acted in it.

Gaspard Debureau had really advanced a step on the ladder of his artistic career. At last he could come on the stage the right way up, with his face in its natural position.

His next meeting with Eugène was after this successful

performance. At first Eugène seemed rather depressed, but suddenly the depression passed and was replaced by feverish animation.

"Has something happened?" Gaspard asked anxiously.

Eugène looked round carefully though they were almost alone in the quiet street, then he said softly:

"It's awfully stupid, Gaspard, I'm suffering from nightmares."

"Nonsense."

"Yes, really. Every night. Sometimes it's black cats and sometimes it's black dogs—and then someone knocks against me—and when I light my candle there's no one there."

"You're tired, Eugène."

"No, only sleepy, because I'm afraid to go home to bed."

"Where do you sleep, then?"

"At Victor's."

"And does that make it any better?"

"There's something else—I know it's all nonsense and simply an excited imagination, but it frightens me because it all seems different at night. I tell myself a hundred times that it's impossible, but it always comes back and I have to believe . . ."

"What?"

"That it's true—and that—that Longval . . ."

"Eugène, you're raving!"

"I know it's madness, but I don't know how to get rid of it."

"Go and see a doctor."

They separated and went their several ways. Next day at noon Gaspard went to see Eugène and found him much better. The doctor had given him a soothing draught and prescribed baths. Eugène got back his lost confidence in his health. Gaspard realized that he was better when he said:

"I've had a talk to Julie Héritier."

"Who's that?"

"Longval's girl."

"Well?"

"She was charming."

"Does Longval know about it?"

"Not at present. And he isn't going to."

"Why are you doing this?"

"I love Julie."

"To my certain knowledge you've loved at least two hundred girls."

"Shut up, Gaspard! This is real love, a love which one might offer the Madonna! The others were only 'passion's slaves,' as some poet says."

"It was Shakespeare," said Gaspard, taught by Longval.

"It doesn't matter," said Eugène. "Realize that I love this girl and I must have her whoever stands between us."

"Do you want to marry her?"

"Perhaps later. But Longval can't marry her either."

"Think it over, Eugène," Gaspard warned him.

"It's my affair—and I shall do as I please."

Gaspard bent his head thoughtfully.

"Have I always got to make way for someone else?" asked Eugène angrily. "I work—I'm writing and creating evening after evening—and everyone laughs at me. Do you know what torture it is to knock at the doors of newspaper offices and be thrown out again? And Victor scrawls a line or two and gets everything he wants."

"You said yourself he wasn't getting on very well."

"Nor is he, but they promise him a future. They only smile pityingly at me. And now that I want love, am I to bend my back and wait for someone to climb up it? No! It shall be as I say! I'll do as I please!"

"I daren't say anything, then," said Gaspard sadly, "I've ventured too far already."

Eugène smiled crookedly—in that second the choice lay before him, but he chose the worse part. He thumped the table with his fist and shouted:

"Yes, if you want to know!"

"Forgive me," said Gaspard quietly and bowed. He turned away to the door.

Eugène's anger burst all bounds.

"Go—go! I'm sick to death of you!" and his fist crashed down on the table.

Gaspard did not move a muscle. Hatred could not upset him now. It usually roused pity in him, but not here. He opened the door.

"And don't come back here! D'you hear?" shouted Eugène.

Gaspard turned and said coldly:

"I shan't come back. And you needn't shout like that. You want to shout down the fact that you're in the wrong, but you can't. You can speak quite quietly now, for I'm not listening."

The door closed.



Gaspard stood still a moment. Another shout sounded through the door behind him, then Eugène broke into harsh weeping. Sympathy urged Gaspard to go back, but reason and the fear of humiliation stopped him.

He went down the stairs and left Eugène behind with his tears and his nightmares.

## XI

### SON OF SANSON

GASPARD DEBUREAU moved to a street in the Faubourg du Temple. It was close to his theater, which was beginning to become a part of him. And besides that his change of address had a symbolic meaning.

Gaspard decided to break off all relations with everything belonging to the Paris salons, loges and palaces. His experience with Eugène had shown him that it was the wrong road and would end sooner or later in humiliation.

My place is not here, he thought. It's with those whom I love and understand, not with those who impress me. I don't want to be disappointed and humiliated again. If I live in a mansard I shall make friends with people who live in mansards and not among plush and silk upholstery.

He felt this all the more since he was beginning to have difficulties with his mother, who had taken to drink. She was still a good mother, she washed his smock for him and mended his trousers, but traces of the hard life which she had lived began to show again; she was suffering from five diseases and imagined ten more. And because she had nothing else to do, she drank rum and anything else she could lay her hands on. Sometimes Gaspard brought her in from the street where she was dancing and singing before a café to earn a few sous. They needed to move to a different neighborhood. It only resembled the one they had left in one thing: hunger often shared it.

Gaspard earned sixty francs a month and paid twenty-five for his room. It was a very small mansard room, scarcely high enough for Gaspard to stand up in. The outside of the house was disappointing; it looked as though some ignorant foreigner had managed to get possession of it under the impression that it was a bawdyhouse. Its plaster was of such an uncertain color that if one person had insisted that it was red and another had guessed blue, they would both have been right. Large rusty gates led on to a dark stairway, where the walls exuded drops of black mois-

ture; the smell was such that it was impossible to guess its origin; and the stairs creaked at each step as if they would burst asunder the next moment. But Gaspard was happy there and proudly brought his mother home.

Madeleine stayed there exactly one night. Next evening when Gaspard came home the bed was empty. He thought that perhaps she had been to see one of her neighbors in the Cour St. Maur and stayed the night with them, and he waited in vain all next morning for her to come home. Then he went out to look for her, but failed to find her. He had to go to the theater to act in the five sieges of the castle, but after the performance he hurried home impatiently. Madeleine was not there.

This began to look serious. He went to see the police the same evening, but they knew nothing about her. A feeling of loneliness and abandon came to him in his mansard; he had never learned to cling to his mother, but the uncertainty tormented him. It was the same as it had been when his father died; he only realized his affection afterwards. Why had his mother left him? What had happened to her? She had not liked the place, it was true; but it was not a bad bed, even though one of their predecessors had taken all the flock out of the mattress and filled it with straw. The curtains were torn and the faded flowered paper with which the walls were covered was worn right through and showed the plaster in patches. But the place was clean; there were no bugs; it could be made a lovely home.

Madeleine never came back and all his efforts to find her were in vain. He was alone in his little room, as he had so passionately longed to be. But he was too much alone.

One night when he came in after a vain search in the neighborhood, and opened his door, he started back in alarm. Someone was sitting in the dark room. As the mansard had no proper window—only a rough hole in the roof, a patch of grayish twilight fell on the stranger's feet but left his face in darkness.

"Who's there?" cried Gaspard.

"It's I, Eugène Hugo," answered the shadowy form. "Light your candle."

The candle flame flickered and threw a misty light over Eugène's face.

"What's happened?"

"Great news! You'll be surprised!"

Eugène seemed to have completely forgotten how they had

parted; he was altogether absorbed by the thought which had brought him; his hair was untidy, his face streaming with sweat, a flickering light in his eyes.

"Say what it is, man!"

"Yes," sighed Eugène. "You remember all that story—about Longval?"

"Haven't you got over it yet?"

"Yes, at last! At last I'm at peace! I went and had a look at Monsieur Longval."

Gaspard realized that Eugène was still in an unhealthy state.

"Like that—now I've got him in the hollow of my hand!" laughed Eugène and closed his fist.

"Tell me what it's all about," said Gaspard, and threw himself on the creaking broken-sprung sofa, worn out. He covered his eyes and waited resignedly for whatever foolishness Eugène should bring out.

"Now listen, Gaspard—D'you know who the refined, gentle, well-educated and distinguished Monsieur Clément Longval really is?"

Gaspard sighed with impatience, but the next words dumbfounded him.

"The son of the Paris executioner!"

Gaspard sat up and put his feet on the floor.

"Eugène," he said gently, "can't you fight against this state a little?"

Eugène laughed.

"I knew you wouldn't believe me—I knew it. But I can convince you."

"How?"

"You understand now why I was to be on my guard against him? You understand the danger?"

"Eugène . . ."

"Longval is the son of the executioner and his real name is Clément Sanson." Eugène's eyes gleamed triumphantly.

"Is it possible?" wondered Gaspard distrustfully. He could not help thinking that it was another of Eugène's exaggerated fancies or delusions.

"Just remember," Eugène broke out, "how silent he was, how evasive—Have you ever been to his home? Has anyone ever been?" And Eugène smiled, a malicious and at the same time childish smile, and threw himself on to the bed. He smiled like a little boy who has stolen back a toy from his playmate.

Gaspard sat and thought. He remembered some of Clément's curious answers, his frequent hesitations, and the sorrow which underlay each of his smiles. He had divined some mystery in him, but this solution was too drastic, too sensational for him to believe in at once. He thought of Clément's refinement, his love for literature, the way he could talk about the poets of antiquity. An executioner? The son of the man who had beheaded the entire royal family—hundreds of aristocrats, Robespierre, Charlotte Corday—he had executed half the people in the land.

"How do you know and how can you prove it?"

"His father has died. Clément went to a notary about the will. The notary hardly knew him and asked him who he was; Clément had to prove it."

"Is that all?"

"No. I saw Clément and followed him, and he went back to the Rue des Marchands—that's where his father lived. I've verified it."

"Very well. And what now?"

"Come with me—I'll convince you! Come along!" Eugène jumped up.

"Why?" asked Gaspard wonderingly. "It may be true, and I certainly don't wonder he kept it secret. He's interested in literature, art—he wanted to be different."

"That was why it was so deceitful." Eugène made another of his sudden movements and his right hand seemed to point at the guilty man as though he were the prosecuting counsel. "He wanted to be where he didn't belong. He wanted to marry someone who didn't belong to him!"

"Was it wrong to be interested in art? It must have been awful for the poor fellow when he realized his fate. Just think if you had been born—as he was—"

"It was his destiny and he must fulfill it." Eugène's hand crushed the rival before him. "Because," and his voice dropped to a venomous whisper, "do you realize, Gaspard, the profession is hereditary? And Clément is the only son. That means that now he'll be executioner."

"Need he be?" breathed Gaspard, almost frightened by the hatred which flowed from every movement, every word of Eugène's.

"His father inherited it too. They're the Paris executioners—the Sansons. Clément has inherited it as well. It belongs to

his family. D'you understand, man, d'you understand the wrong he's done to poor Julie Hérítier?"

"He wanted to be happy," Gaspard defended him, but he felt ill at the thought of poor Clément. "He loved her. Perhaps he hoped he would not have to succeed his father— Anyway," Gaspard had a happy thought, "no one's been executed for a long time, or only by the military. The guillotine hasn't been used for ages."

"No?" smiled Eugène. "I wanted to warn you and I thought you'd be grateful, but you're standing up for him! You don't mind how he wormed his way in among us!"

"I was and am less than he, don't forget that," Gaspard reminded him coldly.

"Perhaps that's why, then," Eugène admitted equally quietly. "But I'll tell you one thing: Julie's going to know this!"

"You're mad!"

"No, it's my duty. You know how he compromised her? You know how impossible things will be for her when it comes out who her young diplomat was."

"And you want to hasten that."

"I want to warn her."

"So as to get her for yourself. Eugène, look at me!"

"You're repaying good with evil," Eugène burst out, "but that's all one to me."

"Eugène," said Gaspard solemnly, "you can't tell her. It's the man's whole life."

"And mine too—and I'm playing straight. Have I changed my name? Let him suffer—he's sinned."

"Eugène, you can't—" And Gaspard caught him by the shoulder again, but shrank back horrified at his expression when he looked into his face.

"Did you hear?" whispered Eugène and pointed upwards. His face had a strained, frightened look.

"Hear what?"

"A cat's fallen down from the roof," whispered Eugène slowly."

"I didn't hear anything."

"Pst." Eugène covered his mouth. "Cats on the roof—they say the devil's in the house."

"There's no cat here." Gaspard tried in vain to quiet him.

"You can't see it," Eugène went on in a whisper, huddling together. "Now the fire's crackling— Do you hear?" His eyes

shone triumphantly. "It's he, that's what it means." Then the strain relaxed, he listened a moment longer and then sank back on to the bed. But his fancies would not leave him; he went on talking faintly. "That's what it means. The devil's in Longval too."

Gaspard sat down beside him. He knew that a great deal was at stake and he tried hard to convince Eugène, bringing all his difficult eloquence to bear on him. Eugène slowly grew calmer, breathed more quietly and seemed to return to normal consciousness. Gaspard ended, convinced that his words would take effect.

The candle had burned down and the flame had almost gone out. Eugène stood facing Gaspard, looking into his face. His lips were compressed and his eyes half-closed. Sympathy or scorn?

"You're right," he said presently in a soft, sweet voice. "I won't go and tell Julie who Clément Longval is." Gaspard's face cleared. He stepped forward, holding out his hand, but Eugène did not take it. "Because," Eugène went on, "I'm going to do something far better." He took a step towards the door and opened it. Then, with a last look at Gaspard, he uttered his last words:

"I'll invite her to the next execution!"

He stood a second longer to smile cruelly at Gaspard's horrified stare, and then the door closed. Gaspard was left alone in the dark, astonished once more at the thing which is called—man.

## XII

### ALONG THE TIGHTROPE AFTER HAPPINESS

FRÉDÉRIC adored the theater and Gaspard adored Frédéric. He admired his unceasing and ever lively interest in the stage, the Funambules, the program, and ways of improving it. Frédéric was a handsome man of thirty who captivated by his mere appearance. In addition, nature had endowed him with magnificent eloquence, a pleasant voice, and a gift for mimicry. He was the hero of the audiences at the Funambules, audiences which paid four sous but got a hundred francs' worth of pleasure out of it, and repaid it with a thousand sous' worth of gratitude. They were people who could not be duped; either you carried them away and they stuck to you till death, or you disappointed them and they hissed you off the stage.

Frédéric used to say:

"An audience is a woman. Take her firmly by the hair, hold her to you—so—till she can hardly breathe, and you master her in no time. After that she is yours. But you can never do it timidly, without self-confidence."

That was Frédéric's view. He had the part of the soldier who was honorable and remained faithful till the end. The people liked that. But Debureau, who played the wicked traitor and had to fall, wounded in the head—what could he make of that?

From the beginning he took his part very seriously. His face, with its treacherous Tartar whiskers, had the hellish expression of a Judas. He cowered together and wormed his way like a snake to the gate to open it to the enemy. He expected applause, but the people hissed him. It happened several times.

"You'd better drop it," Frédéric told him at last.

"I do my best."

There was another actor called Félix, who often insulted Gaspard, but this time he took his part.

"He acts the villain too well . . . the people believe in it."

"Take off your whiskers," Frédéric advised him, "and don't make it so devilish."

Debureau tried the best he knew; we must admit that he al-



ready knew what it was like to be hissed by the audience. But Frédéric did not reproach him with it any more.

"It's all so spiritless," he said of the duels with sabers and axes which were such a prominent feature. "The people deserve better than that."

Like every good and honest actor, he loved his audience, the more so since it had recognized him and picked him out from the crowd of anonymous supers. He wanted the theater to be something more than a circus turn and mock battles. The military atmosphere had evaporated and the memory of Napoleon's campaigns was covered up with the dust of years.

"The smell of gunpowder has blown away from the fields of France, we don't need it at the Funambules, certainly. We'll make a clean sweep," he suddenly decided. He had a dozen plans and struggled with them. The last one was the happiest.

"Harlequin!"

A certain Monsieur Amiral wrote them their first play: "The Cruel Father, or Harlequin Entombed." It was a dumb-show into which he inserted a certain amount of moralizing about parental affection. The actors at the Funambules thought it too didactic, but the audience received the novelty with such eagerness and appreciation that it was clear that the fate of the theater was decided for some time to come, especially as Frédéric was such a delightful Harlequin. Although Gaspard Debureau was devoured by envy, he had to admire and love his leader.

"Some day—some day," he told himself, fixing dazzled eyes upon him, while he himself took the subordinate parts of servants, messengers and policemen.

Thanks to Frédéric the small theater was able to advance at last to the system of abonnements. The young people, in particular, were won over and the dark little theater in the Boulevard du Temple could often boast ovations outrivaling those of Mademoiselle Melibrán at the Opéra.

Harlequin proved to be an inexhaustible subject. Frédéric was far-sighted enough to see that and did not allow the audience's interest to flag. When a decline in attendance showed him that the piece was played out he replaced "Harlequin Entombed" by "Harlequin as Dog" or "Harlequin as Statue." All that was needed was to take an old subject of pantomime or comedy, insert the character of Harlequin in it, and the play was ready. The actors were so accustomed to the parts that often a chance impro-

visitation was enough and they did not need long periods of rehearsing.

Gaspard Debureau got accustomed to his messenger parts. But he used to dream of an evening—some day—in Harlequin's costume.

The thing which detracted from his ability to devote himself entirely to his duties at the theater was his anxiety about his mother and about Clément Longval.

Sometimes he set off to go and see him, but either he turned back or he failed to find him. He was nervous of the meeting; it was in vain that he thought out what to say, invented excuses or questions. He himself saw nothing strange or repulsive in Longval's discovered origin, he was ashamed of the impression made on Clément by the behavior of other people. He would be reproaching Gaspard among them. Clément was certainly undone. He would be suffering, would feel himself banished. What was the least obtrusive way of saying to him: Clément, it doesn't matter. My father used to sit with executioners' assistants at Mantua and Toulouse and God knows where else—I never saw anything bad in it.

At last he managed to meet Clément when he was walking past his house one morning. Clément came out; his face did not look depressed or crushed. Quite the contrary; he looked to Gaspard more distinguished and elegant than ever, and there was a touch of sardonic pride in his face. Gaspard followed him a little way before he got up his courage to call him. He came up behind him and said over his shoulder:

"Bonjour, Clément!"

Longval started, then he smiled a little when he saw Gaspard and answered:

"Bonjour!"

But Gaspard saw in his eyes everything that he had been able to hide by his fine exterior and proud face. His eyes were rather sunken and they kept watching and asking feverishly: Do you know? Do you know? Gaspard made an effort to keep compassion out of his face. He knew that would hurt more than anything else. He smiled more than usual and said cordially:

"I haven't seen you for ages. Where are you going?"

"I thought of going to a café."

"Why, you've passed twenty without going in!" This gave Gaspard away.

"Then you've been following me?" And Clément's eyes ceased to look questioning; they were certain now: he knows! Gaspard decided that it was no use denying it.

"I was afraid of annoying you—I've been making up my mind all this while."

"You aren't—annoying me—now you've made up your mind."

"You understand what I mean, Clément. Let's go to a café together."

Clément had a good look at him and recognized honesty in Gaspard's expression. He nodded and they went in. They had just entered the Boulevard de la Bonne Nouvelle. Gaspard had a cup of coffee and Clément a glass of wine.

"Well—who'll begin?" Clément said ironically after the first sip. "I've got out of the habit of company for some time now."

"Just as you please," said Gaspard gently, feeling like a nurse with a hopeless case whose fits of temper he must endure.

"The gentlemen behind you—are all good friends of mine," Clément went on in the same tone. "You can look round. Yes, those are the ones I mean—they simply don't see us. Oh! Gaspard," he sighed suddenly, "my childhood dream has been fulfilled. I've become invisible. No one sees me, none of the people I used to know. Isn't it fine?"

Gaspard was not misled by the tone of angry joking which must hurt the lonely man even more than himself.

"You must have been through a lot, Clément," he said with sympathy which came from the bottom of his heart. Fear and startled anxiety replaced the irony in Clément's eyes.

"I have, Gaspard. But it's only right."

"Why right?"

"I've lied to the whole world. I went about under another name. I wanted to live," Clément almost shouted, "I wanted to live like a human being! What a crime!"

"I don't think you did anything wrong," Gaspard answered seriously. "A gifted, educated man like you—with such interest in art and science—"

"That's my father's fault. Why did he send me to old Professor Poncet? Why did he let him teach me the Aeneid and the Iliad? Why didn't he throw my books into the fire—why was he so indulgent when I went to the theater so often?"

"Gently, Clément!" Gaspard warned him.

"Don't be afraid. They can't hear me!—What a cruel disillu-

sionment it must be for them! How nauseating! We made friends with the fellow—actually shook hands with him—brrrr!”

“Are they all like that?”

“So far.”

“And what about me?”

“You aren’t one of them, *mon cher* Gaspard. Those are the people who go to the salons of Madame de Médine and the others. These gentlemen . . . Oh, Gaspard!” Clément broke out again. “Don’t be surprised at me, I’ve had no opportunity till now to pour it out to anyone—you’re the first, so you suffer for it.”

“That’s just why I came.”

“Pity you didn’t come before—then I should have known there was at least someone—left.”

“But I’m really not one of them, Clément . . . I’m a nobody—even now it’s still an honor for me to know you.”

“Thanks, Gaspard, but you know how the world looks at it. I’ve cursed fate for not making me a rough, rowdy boy who would have stuck pins through beetles and tormented dogs and cats. Why was I born with my aristocratic thin-skinnedness and my useless interests! If I were a brute only interested in a plate of food and a full glass, everything would be all right. But I kept yearning for higher things—”

Gaspard interrupted him.

“And was your father a brute like that?”

Clément was startled.

“You’re right. He wasn’t. He was a decent fellow. And when he decided to tell me what our profession really was—I was sixteen then—it was a bad moment for him and worse for my mother. It’s from her I inherit my ‘bad qualities.’ ”

“And it was unavoidable that you . . . ”

“It seemed so. My grandfather may have been the first—I don’t know who came before him. King Louis was his last execution. And then my father. *He* had plenty of work! The whole of history passed through his hands. We’ve diplomas in our family, charters, family privileges. I had to succeed him, there was no way out of it. But I wanted to know something about the world—to live. That’s why I took another name. And that was the whole of my diplomacy.”

“You’ve had a bad time, Clément.”

“I have. From the moment I was told about it. Till then I lived in dreams—I wanted to be a writer. But when my father took me to the place and showed me that awful thing . . . ”

"Forgive me, Clément, but there were executions . . ."

"Father always sent me and my mother away. And then there were so few after I grew up. Only about four in all that time."

Clément considered and went on with a sad smile:

"I wasn't so crushed by it at first as my father expected. It was quite interesting. Guillotin was a clever chap and a philanthropist. It's really a magnificent machine. My father taught me to work it, but I never went with him. I used to enjoy listening to his stories, though they were rather frightening: how heroes and cowards died. He was so near to them all. What they talked to him about when he took them on that terrible last journey. Most of them were heroes—especially the women, Gaspard. But the people down below the scaffold—they weren't heroes—they wanted blood and blood and severed heads. . . ."

Gaspard listened, holding his breath. He had expected something like this and it was an obvious relief to Clément to pour it out.

"They had the right to hate them," he pointed out.

"Yes," said Clément Sanson more calmly. "And they've the right to hate me, to loathe me."

"No one hates you. That's all rot."

"Someone does," said Clément sorrowfully. "Someone who's really innocent of any part in this criminal history."

"I was afraid to ask you about that," confessed Gaspard.

"That's been the greatest grief, Gaspard. You know, when I was eighteen and began to notice girls—and when I learned to tell from their faces that I'm not the ugliest fellow in the world—the terrible struggle began in me. And fear for the future. I did so enjoy going for walks and chatting with them. I used to take them flowers. And all the time the terrible thought that if I'd gone up and said: Bonjour, Mademoiselle, my name is Sanson—all would have been lost. I realized then that the world was spoiled for me."

"But your father and mother lived happily together."

"My mother had an exceptional character. She knew that my father was a good and honorable man. I've never heard her reproach him with his profession. They were happy together. But the girls I was fond of wouldn't have been like that, I'm sure. And then I found out for certain."

"How did she find out?"

"I don't know. I can only guess. But she knew it first."

Gaspard looked up. Then Eugène had kept his word.

"If you're to know all, you must hear this too."

"I didn't ask," protested Gaspard.

"I know, but I want to tell you. A few days ago I couldn't have spoken about it, but I can now. It was very simple. After my father's death I realized what my fate must be. But I believed that one sweet creature would have some comfort for me. I thought that if I explained it all clearly to her—as she knows me—knows what I'm really like—"

"Stop, Clément!" begged Gaspard softly.

"We had arranged to meet on the Pont Neuf. I saw her in the distance—she was wearing a diaphanous white dress. I hurried to meet her. I could have fallen at her feet in adoration. But she suddenly stood still before me and looked at me with an unfriendly face. I tried to smile, to greet her. 'Why did you hide it from me?' she asked. At first I thought she was reproaching me about some other woman and tried to overwhelm her with a flood of protestations—how little it mattered compared with the glory of my love for her. But she said again: 'Why did you hide your name from me?' That was a mortal wound, Gaspard. I seemed to fall into an abyss. There was the cruelty of revenger in her voice. For a moment I still hoped for tenderness and understanding. I thought it was hurting her and that she would be glad to hear what I had to say. I looked into her face again, and then I couldn't get out a word. Her eyes were icy. There was death in them. It was the end."

"Mon pauvre Clément," whispered Gaspard.

"Those eyes told me it was the end—it was no use saying anything. I believe I stammered her name and begged her childishly—but her eyes were resolved. She had really only come to be revenged, to let me see what an awful thing I'd done. Then she turned and went away—not quickly and not slowly—she had no pity, she didn't hesitate. She walked away as if I didn't exist, as if she'd never spoken to me. I had ceased to exist for her. That was a dreadful realization—it was the worst thing of all."

They sat in silence for a time. Gaspard was thinking of Eugène.

"And now what?" he asked Clément presently in a whisper.

"Now? I shall pray for there to be no murders committed in France. I thought like a fool that my father would live forever, and that I should go on forever poring over books in the book-sellers' and gathering noseays of women's eyes."

"You see, you'll learn to live," Gaspard encouraged him.

They left the café.

"Are you going to the theater?"

"Yes."

"I'll come some time and see the show. You make me laugh."

"I try to." He held out his hand to Clément.

"Do you realize what you're doing?" smiled Clément Sanson, but his smile was no longer angry and ironical, it was serene and happy.

"We're friends, aren't we?" said Gaspard Debureau.

"You're the friend of the Paris executioner. I warn you!" said Clément sadly and looked his comrade straight in the eyes.

Gaspard did not live in a very favorable atmosphere for stage work. He was still too sensitive, and any tragedy which happened near him touched him too deeply, the more so since he was not without troubles of his own. One of these was his foreign origin. Though his colleagues at the theater saw nothing strange in it and dismissed it with a smile and a wave of the hand, it threw him into depression for nights together. His moods did not change as quickly as theirs, he could not shed tears at a moment's notice; but when he was really upset, it took a lot to dispel his depression.

"I was born at Kolin," he would say if one of the actors asked him.

"Where on earth's that?"

He did not like explaining. He cherished an inner tenderness towards his childhood and the land where his father had been born and which was his own birthplace. But he could not imagine life elsewhere than in Paris. It was Fate. Gaspard decided to be consistent about it; he wanted to become French. Whenever he tried, in exceptional moments of confidence, to tell anyone about his origin, he could not make them understand unless he said: "I'm a Bohemian." Then they nodded and smiled and began to talk of the nomad life. They thought he was a gypsy. And he knew so little himself about the kingdom of Bohemia where he was born: only a few memories of hillside and valley, a few moods and memories, silhouettes with no detailed content. They were things to dream homesick dreams about, not to boast about. That was why Kaspar Dvorjak preferred to be Gaspard Debureau.

At the time of Clément's affair, the repertoire of the Funam-

bules was changed once more. Frédéric had ceased to be satisfied with his harlequinades and created a new character, more remarkable and more capable of adaptation. This was Bluebeard, who was varied by Blackbeard, Whitebeard and Redbeard; once more all the farces and comedies were rewritten and his figure inserted in them in his variegated beard. But Frédéric was not content even with this and he prepared a great, new, wonderful spectacle called "Ahriman," which he wrote himself in traditional style. The longing to act had broken out in Frédéric, and Debureau perceived with joy that what had once been a booth for performing dogs was changing into a theater which would produce real plays. He adored his teacher, Frédéric, when he strode on to the stage in his tin helmet and wooden shield. He was prepared to swear that he was better than Talma.

This was not the opinion of the minister in whose sphere theatrical undertakings fell. Perhaps the interests of the large theaters which felt defrauded of part of their audiences made him issue regulations which meant an upheaval in the little theaters in the neighborhood of the Temple. For some of them a maximum number of characters was laid down, and this maximum might not be exceeded. In the case of others the kind of production was prescribed and might not be changed. Frédéric was absolutely crushed by the unhappy regulations.

It was strictly laid down that all the company, before starting their performance, were to walk in procession and give some tightrope exhibitions.

The actors at the Funambules felt deeply humiliated. They had progressed since last year to real theatrical work and here was someone trying to make rope-dancers of them once more! Fortunately it turned out that almost all of them had training in this art, with one exception, and that was the unfortunate Frédéric himself. He had not the training of his predecessor, who had valued acrobatics above acting. There had to be rehearsals, for not all the ministers in France, with the most stringent set of regulations, were going to drive Frédéric from the stage. They got out the rope and began to practice.

Gaspard Debureau did not take part in the rehearsals. It proved necessary to cut down the number in the company, and Gaspard was the first on the list. He was told that he would be kept on for the run of "Ahriman," but not included in the next program. In vain he boasted that he could do anything on the tightrope. The decision was unalterable. Gaspard was crushed by



it. He explained that he had had private troubles and for that reason had not been able to shine in his parts. He begged to be allowed to go on until the audience hissed him again; he would see that they did not hiss.

But Frédéric would not listen to him; his head was full of tightrope dancing, and Félix, the second actor at the Funambules, did not like Gaspard.

"Go home and tell your mother about it," he said when Gaspard would not stop pleading.

Gaspard's throat contracted with pain. He loved the Funambules with the same fervor that he put into his small parts in the plays. He loved the stinking audience who drank out of bottles during the interval, shoving them under the benches, and shouted at the actors if they were a long time appearing. Was he to be sent away now? And where should he go? Into the open street again?

"Monsieur Félix, do let me go on acting . . ."

"When I need a dummy!"

Debureau bit his lips. Why the devil could he not manage to be rude, spit out a few gross words and laugh it off? Your trouble is this, Gaspard: you love the crowd and you have not learned any of their roughness. So now when anyone shouts abuse at you, you don't know how to answer back, your heart begins to thump and you are like a string plucked by a brutal finger, which cannot stop vibrating. It is the fault of your childhood on the banks of the Elbe and in the mountains of North Bohemia; you were brought up on milk and the soft air of the valleys, not on wine, like the children here.

So, with anguish in his bosom and feeling weak and old, Gaspard watched enviously while his colleagues fastened up the rope.

"Come and hold it," called someone, and he went obediently.

The beginning of the rehearsal went off all right. Some of them were magnificent rope-dancers and had to feign a little clumsiness to hide the past of which they had once been so proud, but which they underrated now. It came to Frédéric's turn. They all explained to him and showed him how to do it. They stretched the rope very low. Frédéric smiled. He was quite sure of himself.

Gaspard watched him enviously but with anxiety. He was almost afraid for him. He knew how bad a fall from the vibrating rope could be and how narrow it was under one's feet.

Frédéric took a few steps. Gaspard was far from wishing him any harm. But at the fifth step Frédéric fell. The magnifi-

cent, stylish, supple Frédéric flew through the air like a ripe pear and lay still on the floor, groaning.

They all rushed to his side.

"If the shopgirls in our boulevard could see me now!" He smiled and fainted.

They sent for the doctor, who said that Frédéric had sprained his ankle. He played again next day, however, but refused to mount the tightrope.

"Let the minister come and dance on it himself."

"But what shall we do?" asked Félix, tearing his hair.

"They'll shut the place up."

"Run the Funambules yourself," said Frédéric. "I'm going."

"Where to?"

"To the Circus Franconi. I'll dance and I'll climb on the parallel bars; but I'm damned if anyone ever gets me on a tight-rope again."

"Shall you stop acting?"

"Franconi's promised me a part."

"But who's to take your parts here?"

"You."

"Then we shall need someone else here."

"Well, there's your man," said Frédéric, pointing to Gaspard.

"Oh, not him. I can't bear the sight of the man."

"He says he can walk on a tightrope."

"Show me!" Félix commanded Debureau.

Gaspard was on the ladder in a second and raced along the rope as if it burned his feet. By the mercy of Providence he managed it. The rope was fairly short and Gaspard had made worse aerial journeys.

"All right, you can stop," said Félix, the new manager of the Funambules.

"Merci, Monsieur," said Gaspard with feeling, "I knew you had a heart." Félix looked up, surprised, and it seemed to Gaspard from the look in his eyes that he was rather touched.

"I didn't want to throw you out," he grunted. "You can stay."

"You know," said Frédéric, "Fate is blind, like Justice. She hurts one and helps another—all with a single movement of her hand."

"I'm sorry about your foot, Monsieur," said Gaspard truthfully. "Perhaps it will prove an advantage to you in some other way."

"Thanks for the consolation."

That night as Gaspard was going to sleep, he prayed fervently for his father's soul and thanked him in his heart for all the beatings with which he had forced him to learn to walk on the tightrope.

It was that which saved Gaspard's theatrical career.

### XIII

#### THE EXECUTIONER'S FRIEND

"DEBUREAU, the ladder!"

"Debureau, fetch me some coffee!"

"Debureau, hand me the powder!"

"Debureau, reach me my wig!"

Gaspard was on the stage, he was an actor, he breathed the dust of the stage; evening after evening he made up his face, put on his brightly colored costume and made a few steps on the stage. He played his part—usually that of the Drunkard who got a beating from Harlequin—but otherwise he was still unnoticed, unknown, the least among the least. If someone else had appeared instead of him one evening, no one would have minded. Sometimes the parterre laughed at his drunken leaps and falls, but they applauded Harlequin who gave him such a marvelous kick that he sent Gaspard spinning in at least three somersaults one after the other.

His colleagues simply used him as a maid of all work. He was not appreciated as an actor. True, he formed part of the troupe, but more as a property than an artist. He was needed now and then—precisely as a scepter is needed in the hands of a king—but it never occurred to anyone that something might eventually be made of the queer fellow.

Only Félix, the new, magnificent Harlequin of the little theater, now and then stared at him meditatively. But Gaspard, who knew that Félix did not like him, was rather alarmed than pleased by his scrutiny. It seemed to him that since Frédéric's accident Félix was more interested in him, but his interest—which Gaspard may only have dreamed—never went further than this abstracted gaze which sometimes strayed to him and dwelt on some movement or grimace.

Apart from this, Debureau went on playing his subordinate and insignificant parts and putting the scepter into the king's hand.

"Debureau, sweep the stage!"

"Debureau, take my costume to the tailor's!"

"Come here, Debureau!"

"Hurry up, Debureau!"

And no one ever said:

"Debureau, how are you getting on?"

There was much, however, about which they might have asked.

They all lived the uncertain life of poor actors, and a whole novel could be written about each one of them. But Gaspard seemed to have something more profound and colorful in his soul; had had more and stranger experiences than fell to the share of all the others put together. These things endowed him with a sensitiveness which identified itself with the griefs of others and shed tears over them; they gave him the weirdest and most cruel friends on earth; they shook him with such violent upheavals that anyone less firm and with a less deep-rooted longing for happiness would have sought absolution in the muddy waters of the Seine.

He moved across gorgeous scenery, swathed his throat in lace and powdered his face with rose-colored powder; his job was to put people in good spirits. And the friend whom he won for himself was the executioner.

No one at the theater asked:

"Debureau, how do you spend your evenings, what do you do when you have tidied up after us, said good night, and gone out?"

If they had, they would have heard queer stories.

The worst time was the evening when Clément Sanson was waiting for him outside the theater, pressed against the wall and shaking as if with fever.

"Clément!" cried Gaspard, alarmed. But his friend looked at him with wild eyes and his teeth chattered as he stammered:

"Gaspard, it's awful!"

He took him by the arm and led him away.

"The thing I was afraid of has happened. I don't know what to do."

"Tell me about it, Clément. We'll see what can be done."

"I've received an official intimation. There's an execution tomorrow."

Gaspard caught his breath. This was something very different from the scent of powder and costumes. Over yonder was the play and the laughter, and bottles of wine under the benches; here was life with all its horror. But Gaspard had been wounded more

than once in his early struggles and lain fainting on the ground, and he was not easily alarmed. He accepted things as they were and always tried to find a practical way out.

"Don't get excited, Clément. You've assistants, haven't you?"

"Yes, two."

"They'll be experienced men."

"Yes, but I must be present."

"H'm. And who's the poor fellow?"

"He's called Foulard—he's about twenty."

"Poor boy. What's he done?"

"He killed two women as they were going home one night."

"Jealousy?"

"No, theft. He stole their earrings and watches."

"Then he's a criminal," said Gaspard, relieved. "So it isn't so bad."

"But the thing fills me with horror!"

"I can understand that," Gaspard nodded.

"And the worst of it is, I shall have to ride in the tumbril—with him—and people will stare at me. A lot of them will know me. That's what I'm dreading more."

"How can I help you?" Gaspard wondered.

They went along the streets which were quite unlighted, turned east from their boulevard past the somber walls of the Prison de la Roquette and came to the cemetery of Père Lachaise.

"We have chosen a fine setting for our talk about executions," said Gaspard. "And the worst of it is I don't really know what to advise you."

"There's a thing I want to ask you," said Clément suddenly. "Do come home and sleep with me tonight. You know I'm not without experience, of myself as well as of the world—but I can't tell you how horrified I am at the thought of tomorrow—horried and ashamed and cowardly."

"I'll come, Clément, with pleasure."

"I was afraid to ask you at first."

"Nonsense," said Gaspard, but had to admit immediately afterwards that he had an unpleasant feeling.

"Is it at your house still?"

"No," Clément set his mind at rest at once, "my assistants set it up today."

He realized Gaspard's uneasiness and added, "Yes, that's how you feel about it—think what it's like for me! You're only walking beside an executioner. You'll be in his house, but I've got

him inside me! Can you realize that? I've an executioner inside me. And I'm afraid of him! I'm afraid of being in the same person with him!"

Gaspard understood that quite well.

"Cheer up, Clément," he said. "I'll come home with you and stay the night. We'll leave the executioner outside."

"You're very good, Gaspard. Who taught you to be so good?"

"I'm not good," smiled Gaspard. "Quite the opposite. I'm envious. I envy the success of every man who's got higher than I. I envy the happiness of every man whom I suspect of being happy."

"You know that sorrow," said Clément, "and so you're able to understand the sorrows of others. You know yourself so well that you can understand others. That's why I believe you'll be an artist."

"It's a pity you're the only person who believes in me."

They came to Sanson's house in the Rue des Marchands. It was really a small private hotel in which Clément occupied only the ground floor. They went in.

"You're in the house of the 'executor,'" smiled Clément. "By a royal charter granted to my grandfather and confirmed by both Republic and Emperor, no one, under pain of grievous punishments, is to call the man who executes the decisions of the court, an 'executioner.' But you know as well as I do that this job is never described in any other way."

"It just occurred to me," said Gaspard as they seated themselves at a large table, "that I made a mistake when I said we'd leave the executioner outside. That's not the right way. It's really only a job, and you've got to do it. Wouldn't it be better if you got accustomed to the idea? Let's let the 'executor' come in and have a chat with him. Shall we? Or am I to amuse you? Shall I act you Othello?"

Clément brought some cold meat, bread and wine and set them on the table.

"We'll see— Have something to eat and drink first."

Gaspard looked round the room. Its rich furniture spoke of former luxury. Rows of books stood in a large beautifully carved bookcase.

"That's the one relic of my former life," said Clément sadly. "I have no right to it now."

"You still take it very badly. I don't believe your father and grandfather had any of these difficulties."

"No. Father used to speak of some of his executions with as much emotion—as, well, as if they'd been lovers' meetings. He often spoke of the marks of favor with which the condemned had loaded him."

"There, you see—"

"But Father had a different character from me. He was a simple, healthy man. I'm different: a weakling, a coward—I shrink from cruelty—I'm too much of a bookworm. To cut off people's heads needs a harder heart."

They began to eat and drink.

"Who's that?" asked Debureau, pointing to a portrait of an old man with a beard, which hung next to a mirror.

"That's my grandfather. He had an easy job—easier than his grandson," said Clément ironically. "In those days if a woman of the streets would take the condemned man as a husband there didn't need to be an execution. She could carry him off from under the very knife."

"It may have been a harsher penalty sometimes." Gaspard attempted a feeble joke.

"Just think," Clément pursued his pleasant memories, "that dear old boy presented a petition to the National Assembly begging them not to approve the motion abolishing the death penalty, because in that case the poor executioner would starve to death."

"When was that?"

"The petition is dated January, seventeen-ninety."

"Poor fellow, he didn't know what was coming."

"A year later he presented another petition, complaining that it wasn't possible to cut off as many heads with the same sword as the Assembly wished. And then came Dr. Guillotin. Poor grandfather," added Clément, staring at the yellowed portrait, "he never thought that a couple of months later he'd be driving his King on the tumbril, and that the King wouldn't have his head on his neck, but between his knees."

Gaspard listened thoughtfully. What an important piece of world history was this little room! Here at this table they had sat, staring into the mirror—the men who had carried out the cruel judgments of men. Here had sat the men who had beheaded a king at the command of his judges and then the judges at the command of other judges. They had come here, exhausted, and had washed themselves and rested their tired arms on the table,



and their wives had brought them their supper. And in their eyes were the last looks of men who had stepped into history, and in their ears the last words with which they took leave of the world in which they had played such an important part. How small and unimportant the city outside seemed with its daily cares and its theaters and—dash it all, even its Funambules!—compared with this room peopled with such great and melancholy memories.

Clément seemed to guess his companion's thoughts.

"I've often had the feeling that those whom we have on our conscience come here, as if it were we and not the judges who sent them into the other world. I've often evoked them myself—from my father's stories and the writings left me by my forebears. Father wrote down what his father told him."

"They must have been terrible moments, I grant, but they had greatness too. You know, it sounds silly, but to be with Marie Antoinette during her last moments doesn't happen to everyone."

Clément frowned.

"Yes. I might have borne that. It might have had significance. If I'd executed Charlotte Corday I might have adored her all the while—perhaps that cruel moment would have given me the greatest rapture of my whole life. But to be with a plain murderer like Foulard at his last moments and appear on the scaffold in the sight of the whole town is a very different matter."

"Will you have to—work the machine yourself?"

"Yes. It's the only way. My assistants get the condemned man ready. My father showed it me that time with a bundle of straw. That was all right. I was astonished and delighted at the perfection of the machine. You pull a lever and a rope tightens—that's all."

"Perhaps you could manage it with your eyes shut."

"I'm finking it." The youngest of the Sansons shook his head. "My knees turn to water. I might faint. I tell you, Gaspard, I could fight to death with a man who attacked me, but to cut off a man's head, in cold blood, and with all those people looking on."

"Clément, I've got an idea!" cried Gaspard suddenly. "I must whisper it to you so that your forefathers don't hear."

He bent forward and whispered into Clément's ear. Clément looked at him surprised.

"Would you like . . . ?"

"Would it give you courage?"

"It certainly would."

"Then I will."

"You're extraordinary, Gaspard. A ta santé!"

"Merci. A la tienne!"

They drank, and the darkness outside the windows listened in suspense to what was happening at the executioner's house on the night before the execution.

As dawn broke two men came out of Sanson's house. One was Clément Sanson in his black frock coat and the other was obviously a subordinate in the clothes of an executioner's assistant. Not far from the street corner two more assistants were waiting for them with the tumbril. They stared a little when they saw the other man, but Clément explained to them:

"A novice."

It was hard to get experience in the job, there had been no executions for so long. They started the horse, and set off, the first two walking beside the cart talking and laughing at the tops of their voices, the other pair in gloomy silence with cold in all their limbs and a rare word to accentuate their silence rather than break it.

"I'm going for the first time and I'm nearly forty," grumbled Clément.

"It's never too late to mend," answered Gaspard dully.

More long silent steps side by side.

"D'you think they've recognized me?"

"No one's even looked at you."

Clément walked carefully so that his heels did not tap on the stones. He wished he were invisible. Even Gaspard pulled his cap down over his eyes. He was the most insignificant actor in a slum theater and little did it matter who saw him, but even so he felt rather ashamed. However, people paid little attention to him—they hardly noticed him.

"Think of your father," whispered Gaspard when he saw that Clément's troubled state did not lessen.

"I am, and of my mother—and my father's pride when he showed it me the first time—but I can't help thinking of other things, too."

"What things?"

"My friends in society . . . the beautiful women whom I've loved . . . Madame de Médine . . . and Julie . . ."

"She'll never know."

"It's all up with me there. There's nothing left for me but street girls."

"There's never been anything else for me, Clément," answered Gaspard more softly still.

"Forgive me!"

"You may find more tenderness in them than in your silken beauties," Gaspard went on, rather touched.

Clément started.

"He's seen me!"

"Who?"

"That man."

He was mistaken again, but in spite of that he was in a constant state of alarm. Gaspard hid his other fear and did not dare think of it. He thought of Eugène and his revenge.

The tumbril stopped before the prison. Clément stood still. Gaspard glanced at him and saw that the sweat was standing on his forehead.

"Come along, man," he said and took him by the arm.

One of the assistants rang the bell and went back to the tumbril.

"We'll wait for you, sir!"

The porter opened the door and made a deep bow, so exaggerated that it would have upset a braver man than Clément.

"I thought they'd be coming with me," whispered Sanson.

"It doesn't matter. Come along."

The porter handed them over to a warder who took them to the condemned cell. Even in the passage they could hear Foulard making his confession in a loud voice. The warder opened the door and they went in. The condemned man was kneeling beside his pallet on which sat the prison chaplain with bent head. The poor fellow did not interrupt his confession; he just glanced at the new arrivals, and gave a choking sob. But he went on with his stammering confession, which was broken from time to time only by anxious gasps.

"I have taken the name of God in vain, I have blasphemed, I have not been to communion on Sundays . . ."

It sounded foolish, almost ridiculous in the mouth of a murderer condemned to death. And at the same time so childish and helpless.

Sanson bowed to the priest and stood by the window with his arms folded. Gaspard looked at the condemned man. He was really only a boy, hardly twenty. Sanson's appearance in his long black coat had obviously upset him. But in spite of that it seemed

to Gaspard that there was more fear in Clément's heart than in the condemned man's.

The confession came to an end.

Now Foulard had to have his hair cut off. Clément tried to look calm; he tried to convince himself that he was calm. He picked up the big scissors which the warder had given him. They stood the condemned man in the center of the cell and one of the warders held a clean white cloth round his shoulders. Clément's hand was shaking; he opened the scissors and touched the condemned man's throat with them. Poor young Isidor Foulard swallowed painfully and Clément drew back his hand.

"Allow me, patron," said Gaspard and quietly took the shears from Clément's hand. He stroked the condemned boy's cheek, looked into his frightened eyes and smiled at him.

"Don't be afraid, mon cher, it doesn't hurt."

"Doesn't it?" asked the young criminal, somewhat comforted.

"Not a bit," smiled Gaspard.

"Thank you," stuttered Foulard.

"Just keep calm," Gaspard exhorted him. "Keep a stiff upper lip and behave like a little hero."

"Yes." Foulard nodded more happily and bowed his head.

The thick brown locks fell on to the floor. Gaspard had never cut anyone's hair, but he managed it satisfactorily. But that was not his most important task. If the boy's got to die, he thought, and I've committed the imprudence of coming here, I will at least do everything I can to make it easier for him. When he felt the boy's shoulder trembling he put a firm hand on it and said:

"Like a hero!"

He knew that the boy was a ne'er-do-well. But he had some experience of how the poor and their children live. Suddenly he asked:

"You've no father, have you?"

"No. I never knew my mother either."

The operation was finished. Gaspard put down the scissors. They could hear the warders and gaolers outside the door chatting about their today's dinner, their last night's drink at the tavern, their wives and sweethearts. Now and then they laughed loudly.

"Ready, patron," said Gaspard.

"Allons!"

The gaoler flung a smock round the prisoner's shoulders. Isidor Foulard took a last look at his cell. I've never seen an actor

look like that, thought Gaspard, when he's condemned to his part for life.

They left the prison and took their places in the tumbril, the two assistant executioners in front, then Foulard with his back to the horse, then Clément and his third assistant. Six mounted soldiers rode in front and cleared the way for them. By this time it was nearly midday and their passage aroused more interest. Folk stopped and stared at the young criminal, but some of them knew what his crime was and flung him a curse or a threat.

They drove through lively and populous streets. People were walking along or sitting outside cafés; windows were opened and filled with spectators. Clément became more and more alarmed by this interest. Each look fell first on him, on his arresting black figure, and only passed on after that to the condemned man. He shuddered and tried to avoid all the eyes round him; but now and then he glanced at a face which looked familiar and it seemed to him that the face would light up with astonishment and exclaim to some other face: Look, why that's Clément Longval, who used to be our pal! Fancy the deceitful scoundrel being the Paris executioner!

Clément tried to think of other things.

But the crowd of people who flocked along, looking forward to the bloody spectacle, hardly allowed him to do that. The clatter of the horse's hooves, the rattle of the wooden wheels over the stones, the shouts and exclamations of the spectators, combined to bring him almost to a state of unconsciousness. He took it all in through a mist and moved as if in a dream.

The white sunlight shone dully through the mist and the air was cold. The roofs were black and wet.

Suddenly the familiar dark silhouette of the "widow" loomed up before them.

They both moved and the condemned man turned instinctively.

There was only a small crowd of people waiting around the scaffold which had been erected the day before. Monsieur Isidor Foulard was not considered by the public as a person whose execution was in any way extraordinary.

Gaspard had eyes only for the condemned man. Foulard was afraid, that was obvious; but in spite of that it was going to be simpler than the poor boy had imagined. Parting from life seemed not to be such a painful and difficult thing as he had expected.

The tumbril stopped.

Clément and Gaspard alighted. The assistants helped the condemned man down. He was trembling, but Gaspard's smile cheered him up. "Like a hero!" Foulard nodded and added with frightened eyes:

"Yes, like a hero!" That was the one thought which could save him from himself.

Gaspard took him by the elbow and with a look showed him the crowd under the scaffold. His expression said: Keep a stiff upper lip! Don't get the wind up! Don't let the people see you care! Foulard understood Debureau's expression, he held his head up and mounted the steps with a firm and only slightly convulsive step. The two assistants took charge of him again. They made him kneel down, bound his hands, placed him under the knife with his head in the dreadful circular hole. Foulard was almost paralyzed; but when he was lying down he made a last effort to turn his head towards the man who was giving him his ultimate strength.

Gaspard put all his forces into his last look. And something like a smile of thanks appeared in the upturned eyes of the young murderer.

Then the first assistant gave the signal to Clément.

Clément touched the rope with a clammy hand and shuddered. Just then he felt Gaspard's hand encouragingly on his elbow. He turned and pulled the rope. There was a metallic clatter like the sound of a shot. That was all.

A murmur of applause was heard from the crowd, which had grown silent.

Clément had not the strength to look at his handiwork and went slowly down the steps. Thank God, that was over! Gaspard took his arm and helped him to the tumbril. They waited till the assistants had performed their last duties. It was only when the burden had been loaded on the tumbril and the vehicle was in motion that Clément heaved a sigh and said,

"It was awful!"

"It's over now."

"I blame myself for dragging you into this, Gaspard. But I think if I'd been alone I should have run away when we were at the prison. I haven't the character for it, I haven't . . ."

"You must forget it all. And the boy's all right now," said Gaspard, putting a hand on the unhappy Sanson's shoulder.

Clément took it and pressed it hard.

"You did two good turns, Gaspard," he answered. "To me and to him as well. Heaven reward you for it."

"Heaven?" smiled Gaspard, looking up.

He started. On the balcony of a house which they were just driving past stood Eugène Hugo with a small group of well-dressed people. Among them—yes, it was certainly she—Julie Héritier.

"Bravo, Sanson! Bravo, Sanson!" the harsh voice of Eugène suddenly shouted.

Clément looked quickly that way. The color drained from his face. He hesitated as though uncertain whether to jump down and run away or throw himself on the group in the balcony. He saw Julie, who was looking half-smiling, half-annoyed. Clément stood up as if he wished to penetrate her face with his look. The smile and the annoyance both vanished at once and only scorn was left.

"Bravo, Sanson!" shouted Eugène, and his companions laughed. "It was magnificent. Congratulations on your promotion!"

"Drive on!" cried Gaspard, and the assistant executioner whipped the horse. The applause and shouting faded behind them. Clément sat down heavily; his face was like marble; he hardly seemed to breathe.

"Eugène's revenge," whispered Gaspard. "You mustn't let that trouble you now."

"Did you see her face?" Clément asked after a long silence.

"It's all over. Forget it."

Clément moved his head slightly. There were hatred and disappointment in the lines round his mouth. The tumbril stopped at the cemetery of the Madeleine.

"If you like, sir, we can see to this by ourselves," said one of the assistant executioners harshly.

"Thank you."

He pulled out all the money he had in his pocket and put it into the outstretched hand. The tumbril drove through the gates and Clément and Gaspard turned back.

Just then a boy ran out from the gateway, sized the two men up with a rapid glance, and then went up to them.

"Vous permettez?" he said with a confiding smile and put his closed fist against Clément's sleeve.

"What on earth are you doing?" asked Clément.

"For luck," smiled the boy and opened his hand. There were dice in it. He rubbed them once more against Clément's coat.

"Thank you!" And he ran off. Clément was speechless.

"The executioner seems to bring luck," said Gaspard.

"To everyone but himself."

"You must be patient, Clément. The pain will pass, and then you'll find . . ."

"You're afraid of the word, aren't you? Because you're honest enough to know that there can never be happiness for me now."

They went on a few steps.

"Good-by, Gaspard," said Clément. "I shall be better alone."

"Just as you please."

"I've let you in for a pretty awful time. Forgive me if you can."

Gaspard gave him a friendly smile.

"And I've no means of paying my debt to you. I gave it all to those fellows who took the rest of the job off my hands."

"I wouldn't have taken anything."

"But you've got to eat, Gaspard. I know you're not getting along any too well. But come tomorrow, do! I shall be glad to see you. I can't give you anything now—unless perhaps—if you care—for luck." And he offered him his sleeve, not daring to offer his hand.

"Never lose heart!" said Gaspard, remembering the great man who had said those words to him. He took Clément's hand in both of his and pressed it.



XIV  
VICTOR HUGO

GASPARD DEBUREAU wore himself to tatters over his parts, but no success seemed to come his way. Félix won the enraptured devotion of the audience with his Harlequin. At times Gaspard almost felt like abandoning the theater where he was still the most insignificant person. He was urged on to this by the case of Frédéric, who had not ended up with Franconi as he had expected. The minister's envy followed him even there with a regulation that all the actors must ride on horseback. Frédéric had never ridden on horseback, but he imagined that it must be easier than dancing on a tightrope. Only the circus horses don't walk; they either trot or gallop. Frédéric fell from his horse as he had fallen from the rope and broke a rib. He bade good-by to Franconi and was accepted by the Odéon. He bade good-by to pantomime with processions and duels and decided to go into legitimate drama. And he was successful.

If he had been French, Gaspard might have made up his mind as easily. But his thick head did not let him. Everything in him cried out for dumb-show. He did not like words.

Frédéric's adventures called forth many jokes and much laughter behind the scenes. But it only strengthened Gaspard. Never lose heart! Go on. Overcome obstacles.

But life did not make things easier for him on the stage. There was only one obstacle there, and that was Félix as Harlequin. This obstacle was insuperable; even if he killed Félix there would still be another Félix or Frédéric. No one would point at Gaspard and say: Look, there's your new Harlequin! Possibly he did not even want to act the part. Debureau hated Harlequin.

He tried to meet Clément Sanson, but never caught him at home. A neighbor told him that Monsieur only came home towards morning. Then he tried going to see him in the forenoon, but again he did not find him. Perhaps Clément did not want to let him in; perhaps he was asleep. A different neighbor told him that Clément went to the gaming rooms and played for high

stakes. Gaspard was sorry, but he could not save him from that. He would never succeed in getting into the rooms, and in any case he did not know where they were.

About a month after his last painful meeting with Clément a little note was handed to him at the theater.

"Monsieur Gaspard Debureau at the Théâtre des Funambules [he read]. If it is possible, please come and see us at No. 11, Rue Dragon. My brother Eugène is seriously ill and often asks for you. I shall be most grateful to you if you will be so kind as to comply with my request.

"Yours sincerely,

"VICTOR HUGO."

Gaspard overcame his aversion and set out for the Rue Dragon. He cursed his soft heart which forced him to play the nurse and prevented him from minding his own business. He mounted the stairs of No. 11 in trepidation. How would he find Eugène? What should he say to him?

It was his first meeting with Victor Hugo since he had been filled with dislike for the bored child leaning back against the cushions in the coach. He had grown up into a handsome young man, rather thin, but with bright fearless eyes and magnificent wavy hair.

"I'm most grateful to you for coming at my request, Monsieur Debureau. Eugène often calls out for you."

"What is the matter with him?"

"He keeps on having attacks of fever. And then he says such senseless things. I'm afraid he is suffering from some mental disturbance. I thought that as he was obviously in close contact with you—closer than with me—you would be able to explain a great deal which is a complete mystery to me."

Debureau did not quite know how to behave towards this distinguished-looking young man who spoke somehow differently from other people. Only Clément Sanson—while he was still Longval—sometimes used such words and strung them together in such long sentences. What surprised Gaspard was Hugo's poorly furnished flat. He had thought of them as a rich family.

"Eugène doesn't live alone any more?" he asked.

"No. We aren't—very well off just now," Victor Hugo answered rather unwillingly, with an evasive look. "Will you come and see Eugène?"

"Volontiers," said Debureau with an awkward bow.

"In there," said Victor Hugo and stood aside to let him enter the next room. Here as well Gaspard at once divined poverty in spite of the fact that a few rare objects pointed to a better past. But there was only a tiled floor defaced with dirty cracks and striking cold into the room. A wooden bedstead stood in the shadow of a cloth which was hung across the window and had been soaked in pitch. But Eugène was not lying on the bed. He was leaning back helplessly in an old armchair with black horse-hair bursting through its flowered cover.

When he grew accustomed to the dimness in the room Gaspard saw that the form which had risen from beside the sick man's chair was that of a beautiful fair-haired girl, very well dressed. He had another look at her face. No, it was not Julie. Then he recovered himself and made his bow.

"This is Monsieur Debureau," Victor presented him. "This is my fiancée, Mademoiselle Adèle Foucher."

Gaspard bent to kiss her hand.

"Gaspard!" called the sick man from the armchair.

"Lie down, Eugène, don't get up," Adèle quieted him, drawing his shoulders back again into the easy chair. Eugène let his head fall forward and pressed it against the white hand which was smoothing his pillows. This was not lost on Gaspard.

"I'll leave you alone for a little, shall I?"

"But you'll come back, won't you, Adèle?" begged Eugène fervently.

"I'll come back. Now don't excite yourself."

"No."

Adèle made a little bow and went out of the room.

"You'll stay with him a little while, Monsieur Debureau?"

"If Eugène would like me to."

"I expect so. I'll go now—and I'll be back again soon. Thank you."

The two men were left alone.

"Well, Gaspard?" asked Eugène a little venomously.

"Well?" returned Gaspard.

Eugène blinked.

"Do you like Adèle?"

"She is certainly a lovely lady," said Gaspard, perplexed.

"I think so too. Would you like to know my greatest secret?"

Gaspard bent down to him.

"She's Victor's fiancée, but I love her."

Gaspard wanted to throw him out of the room, go away, or say something brutal.

"And what about Julie?"

"She is Proserpine."

"What?"

"She's an arch she-devil—the wife of Boalberith. But sh! Not a word to a soul!"

"What are you talking about, Eugène?"

"You ask silly questions just like the others," cried Eugène crossly. "You don't understand. You're as stupid as the others!"

Gaspard could contain himself no longer.

"Why, you destroyed another man's happiness because of your great love. What's happened to it?"

"All gone." Eugène waved his hand. "Ftt! Finished! Oh, it's all over and done with."

"But why?"

"I realized that she belongs there, too."

"Who? Where?"

"Sh! Shut the door! Draw the curtain!" But he did not wait for it to be done, but drew Gaspard closer to him and whispered: "I'll tell you, but you must never give it away to anybody! I know almost the whole family of hell."

"But, Eugène—"

"Gaspard!" The sick man raised himself in his easy chair. "Don't think I'm wandering. This is the sacred truth. It isn't fancy."

"Yes, of course," Gaspard pacified him. "What is your infernal family like?"

"Sh! Beelzebub is the supreme father. Satan, his son. Eurinom, the prince of death. Moloch, prince of the vale of tears. . . . Boalberith, the high priest of hell. Proserpine, the arch she-devil. They are all incarnate. My brother is Eurinom. Sh!"

"Who told you all that, Eugène?" asked Gaspard unhappily.

"Berbiguier's books."

"Who's Berbiguier?"

"Don't you know the famous Berbiguier? Of course, you're not educated—and particularly not in things of this sort. Berbiguier read all the sacred books and proved to me that devils exist in hell. Do you remember how that cat fell off the roof? I've a good memory to remember it still. That was a sign. There are signs like that. Or when the log in the hearth crackles and smoke blows out at the same time. Have you noticed that?"

"I haven't got a fireplace; there's no heating in my room," answered Debureau.

"That's why the cat fell down."

Suddenly Eugène started. He pointed his forefinger straight at Gaspard's face.

"Look here! Aren't you one of them too?"

"One of whom?"

"One of their family? There are still a few missing from my assemblage—Leonardo, the great king of the Sabbath—and Pan, the king of Purgatory . . ."

"Do you see that in everyone?" Gaspard asked him sadly.

"No. I recognize it at first glance."

"Eugène." Gaspard laid his hand on the disheveled hair. "Eugène, can't you think of anything else? Don't you remember the beautiful talks we used to have when we sat together in the little taverns in the Rue d'Orléans—when we used to walk together along the Boulevard du Temple—where I went with you that evening—and you read me your verses under the lanterns—"

Gaspard looked pityingly into the bewildered eyes. Little lights hovered about in them, disappeared and came again. Was there still reason behind those lights? Could memory find the way to it? It seemed so. The whole of Eugène's face lost its strained look of emptiness and gained a little concentration.

"Remember, Eugène, please remember!" begged Gaspard. His partial hatred turned to pity. "Clément used to sit there with us sometimes, but he wasn't Beelzebub, or whatever you called him, he was a good comrade of ours. We were all friends together—and it was better so, ever so much better than now!"

He could find nothing else to say to him, nothing which in his view seemed more appropriate. Once more there was the dance of the little lights in his eyes and the effort at thought in his face. And then his mouth grew plaintive and the lights dissolved in mist.

"I can't help it, Gaspard. What's in me is conviction—it's nothing transitory. I'm terribly afraid of it, but it's all true. Why do you all wrong me? Why do you all hate me?"

"Who wrongs you?"

"All of you," sobbed Eugène childishly. "That's the true reason. Oh, I'm afraid of everyone!"

"But your brother's taking care of you—"

"He wrongs me most of all!"

"Victor?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"He writes frightfully bad poetry—much worse than mine—and he's successful. He prevents me from being successful. He sees to it that no one accepts my things. Isn't that dreadful? I dare say you don't understand."

"Am I to tell him that?"

"No. Don't tell anyone. One can't speak truthfully to evil companions."

"Stop!" Gaspard burst out. "Tell me where this Berbiguier of yours lives and I'll break his nonsense over his head!"

"Oh!" shrieked Eugène and cowered down in his chair as if he were afraid of immediate vengeance from the evil spirits for this treatment.

"Aren't I right?"

Eugène shook his head and did not answer. He blinked his eyes fearfully. He watched Gaspard with mistrust. He's looking for demons in the darkness too, thought Gaspard. I haven't succeeded. And he decided to make one last attempt.

"Eugène, let's stop talking in riddles. You believe in another world, but all people are not devils. You're being nursed by a lovely creature like Victor's fiancée . . ."

A look of rapture overspread the bewildered face.

"She doesn't belong to your company of devils?"

"No," whispered Eugène as if under a spell. "I love her. I'm going to marry her."

The earth seemed to open under Gaspard's feet as if it would engulf him.

"But she's Victor's fiancée."

"I shall take her away from that devil!"

"But, mon cher Eugène," said Gaspard and fear for a fresh victim trembled in his voice, "think of Julie. You wanted her too, you destroyed Clément's happiness—and then you tired of it all. Consider what you're saying."

"I know," Eugène said in an almost normal voice and stared gloomily before him. "But I love her so, my friend. I can't live without her. And she can free me from the kingdom of specters, from the kingdom of hell."

"Did Berbiguier tell you that too?"

"No. They told it to me themselves."

"Who?"

"They did. The devils. They love me. They told me I should

get out of their power when I marry Adèle. Oh, I love her so infinitely, Gaspard. I could kiss her shoes."

"But you mustn't love her, Eugène."

"I worship her. I could kneel before her all night without ever touching her. I would only kiss her dress and her shoes and she could do what she pleased with me. I can't live without her, Gaspard, I can't live without her!" Eugène burst into tears.

Someone knocked at the door and Victor came in.

"Well, how is he?"

Gaspard shrugged his shoulders and pointed helplessly to Eugène, who stopped crying immediately and looked at his brother with the same distrust as he had at Gaspard.

"Are you glad Monsieur Debureau came, Eugène?"

"Yes," said the sick man quietly. "And where's Adèle?"

"She's gone home."

"Gone home?" shrieked Eugène and started up. He stared into his brother's face with half-closed eyes, dark with hatred. There was nothing in them but anger and hostility.

"Why shouldn't she?" asked Victor placidly.

"She's deceived me!" hissed Eugène and fell back on his pillows. He closed his eyes and only his lips repeated soundlessly: "Thief! Traitor!"

"Come, please." Victor bowed to Gaspard and opened the door. "I'm afraid Eugène is in a very bad humor."

"Au revoir." Debureau touched Eugène's hand and went out.

In the small vestibule they stood together a little while. Victor stared into Gaspard's face with a strained and questioning look.

"How did he strike you?"

"I'm afraid he's really ill."

"Yes. Did he tell you about the powers of hell?"

"Yes."

"He seems to be obsessed with the idea. It's strange. He was always so healthy and full of life."

"He spoke of a certain Berbiguiet . . ."

"We all know him. People laugh at him, but Eugène believes him."

"And then . . . and then . . . about poetry . . ."

"That's a sad story. No one could have wished more than I that he should be a poet. But Eugène has ambition and nothing else. It's a pity."

Gaspard knew that. And now how should he mention Mademoiselle Adèle . . .

"And he spoke . . . he complained . . ."

"Of what?"

No. He could not put it into words. A certain shame prevented him. He must get round it.

"I think he badly needs a doctor."

Victor glanced round uncertainly.

"That's the worst of it. I hinted to you already that we're not exactly flourishing just now. Eugène has ceased to earn—naturally. We're quite alone because—we are not in touch with our father."

Gaspard sighed sympathetically, but Victor interrupted him.

"It's not necessary for me to explain to you about . . ."

"No, no," said Gaspard anxiously. "I understand, I understand perfectly. I have no one either," he added earnestly.

"Of course I could not have talked about it to anyone else. But you are Eugène's friend, so maybe you know it already. And you will not be offended by my frankness."

"I—I appreciate it," stammered Gaspard.

"Thank you." Victor bowed once more. "We did have the doctor, but the opposite happened to what should have. Instead of the doctor curing Eugène, Eugène drove the doctor mad. He wrote him out a senseless prescription. This was all it was: buy a candle at a shop with two entrances, get them to return you two coins, leave by the door by which you did not enter and throw the coins over your head; light the candle and sprinkle salt in the flame—and then burn a paper on which are written the names of all the devils! Pure nonsense!"

"Did Eugène do it?"

"Conscientiously. We nearly had the house burned down. I've not had the doctor in the house since."

"I'm so sorry I can't help you in any way," said Debureau.

"I didn't mean that," said Victor, offended, and an angry gleam shot through his eyes. "Au revoir, Monsieur Debureau, and forgive me for troubling you."

"Not at all. If you think it helps Eugène at all, I'll come again."

"That will be very kind of you. Au revoir, Monsieur Debureau."

"Good evening, Monsieur Hugo."



On the evening that the Théâtre Lyrique was first lit with gas the actors at the Funambules hurried to get through their program early. All the actors were tremendously interested. What kind of gas? It was said that in London it had been tried at Drury Lane and its excellence proved. This gas made it possible to light the stage through special colored filters and theatrical folk considered that it had great possibilities. But there were a few experienced, skeptical voices: "It'll burn your theater down and you'll be glad to go back to oil. You'll see!"

Nevertheless they shortened the last turns so as to be able to go and look at the marvel. Debureau hurried along with the rest. They reached the theater as the performance ended and all trooped in to see the famous illumination. Debureau was doubly proud. It was a fellow countryman of his, called Winter, who had brought the miracle over to France; all the newspapers were full of it. He was proud of him and boasted about it at the theater, but some of them thought that Bohemia was in Hungary and the others would not believe that Bohemians had any particular country, since they were always traveling about in caravans.

"Gaspard!" someone addressed him. He looked round. It was Clément Sanson.

What was it about him which was changed? He wore a beautiful glossy frac, a snowy shirt front and a soft pearl in his cravat. But his face was much thinner, there were dark shadows round his eyes, his forehead looked higher somehow—Gaspard thought—and his eyes were brighter. Fatigue combined with yearning.

"Clément!" breathed Gaspard. "Where have you been all this long time?"

"Wait a minute," said Clément. He retrieved his overcoat from the cloakroom and led Gaspard outside. The threadbare player from the slums felt ashamed beside him. Clément looked like a count.

"I owe you an apology, what?"

"No, why?" protested Gaspard.

"I know you are unassuming, a splendidly unassuming friend," said Clément seriously, but with a certain new lightness in his voice like that of people who are slightly tipsy—only Clément had certainly not been drinking—"You come when one needs you and keep away when a fellow forgets you. And your friends are so harsh and brutal that they treat you like a Negro slave who has performed his task and can go."

"But, Clément," Gaspard interrupted him with a smile, "I've never presumed . . ."

"That's just it. It's your virtue which we all fall down before. But I didn't forget you, Gaspard. I was—sparing you—rather."

"Sparing me?"

"Yes. You see, I'm what is called a worldling now."

Now it seemed that Clément was glad to put on the appearance of tipsiness so as to talk more effectively.

"I didn't forget you, but I couldn't drag you into what I was crawling into, do you see? You are at the beginning of your life, you want to work—and I'm at the end of mine, I've nothing more to look for. That's why I've—yes—I've been avoiding you. I've been comforting myself with the thought that you would understand."

"That's all right," said Gaspard quietly. "Au revoir then."

"No!" cried Clément. "I didn't mean that."

"Why? I see you're getting on all right and I'll wait till our next meeting. I promise I'm not hurt at all."

"Wait, Gaspard. I appreciate your generosity, but as today has brought us together, we won't separate. Come and be my guest tonight."

"I'm badly dressed."

"You crazy fellow. Here's my overcoat."

"No. I should look more ridiculous still."

"You're magnificently dressed, and besides we're going where no one will notice us."

He called a fiacre and they got in. Clément gave an address.

"So you're squandering your money now?"

"Are you reproaching me?"

"No. I understand."

"One thing I ask of you, Gaspard. Please don't put on airs with me like a pure-minded man with a dirty hog."

"But I don't . . ." protested Debureau.

"And in the second place, don't pity me. Those are two things which I cannot endure."

"That's all right."

"Because I do what I like—and especially what I must."

He was silent for a moment and then went on more slowly:

"Perhaps you're surprised—to see me here—when you remember how we read Vergil under the plane trees in the Tuileries—but do try to understand . . ."

"I'll really go if you'd rather," Gaspard offered once more.

"No, no. You simply must be with me tonight. You must be merry too."

"Must I?"

"You must. If you have to amuse other people you must be able to be merry yourself. Gaspard Debureau, I set you a task. You are to amuse *yourself* tonight. If you don't, you're no good actor. Do you accept?"

"If you like," Debureau nodded.

The fiacre stopped before a beautiful house with a large lamp shaded with green.

"Come, my friend," said Clément. "You don't know this place. For reasons which are easy to understand it's immediately opposite the end of the world." While they were still on the pavement he stopped once more. "And believe me, I'm very glad you're with me and that's the truth; I'm not forcing myself. And you must amuse yourself too—as though there were not the shadow of my discourtesy between us—do please, as a favor to me."

They went in.

Gaspard had never been in a place like this before. The great room was full of lights, mirrors, murmuring. Candlesticks stuck out from the walls with long, slim candles blazing in their horizontal branches. The walls were hung with green satin. At the end of the room was an immense mirror in a glass frame. The windows, leading God knows where, were closed with thick wooden shutters, ornamented with fretted flowers, and further provided with padlocks. Four doors led out in different directions; curtains of tapestry hung before them from the ceiling.

And the people! A great many gentlemen dressed similarly to Clément. And the women wore magnificent dresses, women with powdered arms, penciled eyebrows, blackened lashes and reddened lips. When one of them moved she spread a cloud of scent of amber perfume and poudre à la maréchale, which Gaspard knew from the prima donna at the Funambules.

These were not women from society. They lolled in easy chairs, cocking their legs, clad in cherry-colored stockings, their heads leaning back; others were laughing together in a little group; a few sat at the large table in the center.

This formed the center of the room. It was crowded with people playing cards. And before each of them was some money, whole piles in front of some, and less in front of others. But

even the smallest pile was equal to Gaspard's wages for almost a year.

Clément looked questioningly at Gaspard to see what he thought of the new wonder, but had no time to catch what he said. They had hardly gone a couple of steps into the room when there was a shout from one corner and a group of young men and women rushed at Clément like the wind, and crowded round him shaking his hand. Two of the women flung their arms round him and kissed him.

"Don't leave my friend out!" cried Clément, freeing himself from their embraces with a laugh. "My comrade good and true."

Gaspard would gladly have vanished, but someone's hands had caught hold of him and one of the girls in cherry-colored stockings and carmine lips caught him by the elbow.

"I'm a favorite here." Clément smiled at Gaspard who smiled back in order to please his friend. "He's from the country!" he explained to his merry acquaintances. "I'm showing him Paris. Margot, don't sulk. I'm putting him in your charge."

The cherry-colored Margot smiled up into Gaspard's face. She was beautiful like all the women there, and her dress was cut so low that it hardly concealed her figure. Gaspard was almost afraid to look.

"Shall we play?" asked the young men round Clément.

"Supper first!"

They all sat down merrily in a corner and Clément ordered the meal.

"Beefsteak, pie, cheese, pastries! And vin moulin à vent!"

He smiled, replied whimsically to the greetings of the men and pressed two lovely girls against him, one on each side. He's drowning the sound of his troubles, thought Gaspard. Here he can forget.

But he was not shocked. A man with Clément's fate could hardly act more sensibly. They were giving him happiness, that was evident. He longed for intoxication and flung himself into it head foremost. It was all so beautiful, it seemed to Gaspard, whose amusements were much poorer and limited to an occasional glass of wine when some guest or acquaintance took pity on him. But here it was like a fairy tale. Gaspard was particularly glad that nobody noticed him. Only the red-cheeked Margot now and then hung round his neck and pressed her half-naked body against him, making him hot all over. But apart from that they all had eyes only for Clément.

"Our mysterious cavalier!" cried the girl on his left.

"Our secret millionaire!" the girl on the right cut her out.

Poor disinherited Clément, of course, could wish for nothing better than this role. Gaspard could not even imagine how much money it was costing him to entertain the merry company among whom he was so well received. He ate and drank with the others.

"Have you known Monsieur Clément a long time?" prattled Margot beside him.

"Yes, a long time," smiled Gaspard, as Clément spurred him on with a lively glance from the other side of the table. "We lived together for a time."

"Then you must be rich too?"

"Oh, no," protested Gaspard anxiously. "He paid for us both."

The interest of the red-cheeked beauty diminished perceptibly, but she was too spurred on by Clément's glances encouraging her not to let his friend depart from the path of general merriment.

"A toast!" he cried and stretched his hand to Gaspard across the table.

"Good health!" cried Gaspard cheerfully.

"Whose health?"

"To the health of all beautiful women!" ventured Debureau timidly.

"Bravo!" There was a storm of applause and something moist and soft touched Gaspard's cheek. Margot had kissed him.

"And now let's play!" cried Clément.

Gaspard was pushed by the others towards the table in the center. The roulette ball was hopping round on the brightly colored field. A place had just been vacated at the corner and Clément sat down with a couple of his friends and a few new players behind and opposite him. Some of them were women. But only four of them were playing.

"Gaspard, come and play too."

"Oh, I can't!"

"Then amuse yourself!"

"We've nothing to drink!" Margot complained from Gaspard's side.

"Here!" cried Clément and gave her a note for such a sum as Gaspard had hardly seen in his whole life. He opened his mouth in surprise, but Margot smiled and slipped her hand into his.

"Come!"

"I'd like to watch a little while . . ."

The playing began. Bundles of notes for the same value that Clément had given Margot a moment before were flung down on the table. Clément threw the first card; he was laughing and joking all the time. He was happy. The crowd of faithful followers who caught up all his words and laughed at all his jokes pleased him. The bundle before him grew at each throw.

"Gaspard, you're not amusing yourself!" He looked up from his cards for a moment.

Gaspard clenched his teeth and ventured:

"I've nothing to drink!"

"Forgive me!" cried Clément apologetically; he seized some of the notes before him and gave a handful to Gaspard. Gaspard took them. It had turned out as he expected. He put the money into his pocket carefully, but he was almost afraid to look at it.

Margot put her arm round his neck.

"Come now, do!"

He offered no resistance and she led him back to the supper table and ordered wine. As though at a word of command someone began to play the concertina; not with strident merriment as they played for the dancers in the Faubourg St. Germain or au Robinson, but slowly and tearfully, like someone warding off longing, raising his hands and stroking the shoulder nearest him.

"Have a drink, mon ami," begged Margot. "Whose health?"

"To the health of all beautiful women," Gaspard repeated tipsily.

"All of them?"

"No," he corrected himself. "A ta santé!"

"You're a dear," she cried and pressed herself against him. She was warm and seductive, but as he looked at her he now and then noticed something far away in her eyes, a look which passed over his head, perhaps a message of understanding with someone else. This grieved him. It was the first time he had ever had a woman like this in his arms; he would have liked to have her all to himself.

"I should like to have you for my wife," he said and clasped her firmly in his arms.

"You crazy fellow! Me?"

"Yes, you!"

"Really?" She snuggled against him. "It isn't the wine talking?"

"No," he said and emptied a whole glass heroically.

"Do you want me?"

"Yes!"

She smiled at the group round the gaming table and took Gaspard by the hand. He had ceased to know what he was doing. She led him to one of the doors curtained with tapestry. They went into another room where two couples were embracing, then into an anteroom from which a flight of stairs led upwards. Margot whispered something to a lady who passed them on the stairs, and led Gaspard on like a child. They came to a passage covered with shaggy carpet. She opened a door and pushed him in.

"I'll be back in a minute," she whispered.

He looked round him as if in a dream. He had certainly never gone like this with a woman before. He trembled with impatience, but still was afraid. The room to which Margot had brought him was like a little ornamental cave with an oil lamp over the bed. It was dim there and perfume drifted from all sides. The walls were covered with a green marbled paper. Two candlesticks stood on the table, but there were no candles in them. There were two chairs with frayed backs, a carpet, and—the bed. It was not an altar, but it was a beautiful bed, with curtains floating above it, giving it an ethereal look.

Before Gaspard had time to pull himself together, Margot was back. She had changed her dress and now wore something to which Gaspard could not have given a name, but which was a coat, a chemise and a *négligée* all in one. She looked lovelier than ever in it, like a fairy.

She came in, went close up to him, and slowly pressed her whole body against him. He felt her from her knees to her breasts.

"Do you still want me?"

"Don't jeer at me," whispered Gaspard.

"Jeer?"

"There's something scornful in your voice all the time. I know it's because I'm here for the first time . . ."

She covered his mouth with her hand.

"Don't spoil it," she said. "I like you."

Every movement, every word, was full of tenderness and elegance. Her voice was soft and sweet.

"I like you too," he said helplessly.

"Well then?" She smiled and added more softly: "Aren't you going to undress?"

"Yes." He realized that was necessary. "Don't look!"

She sat down on the bed and let herself fall back on the pillows, singing softly:

"Je t'attends, je t'attends,  
L'oiseau revient au printemps . . ."

Debureau drew near to her on tiptoe. She held out her bare arms to him and he kissed her fearfully.

"Viens, mon . . ."

He knelt down beside the bed.

"But you mustn't do that, mon cher, I'm not accustomed to it."

"Nor am I," whispered Gaspard.

"I can see that," she said unsmilingly, "but don't be afraid. I won't hurt you. I like you."

"Why?"

"Don't ask me. But I couldn't embrace you if I didn't like you—if I didn't love you at least for tonight. . . ."

"For tonight?" Gaspard repeated bitterly.

"Do you think you'll still love me tomorrow? Haven't you ever touched a woman before?"

Gaspard's unhappy character would not let him enjoy this beautiful moment into which he had been lured. He had happiness within grasp, love lay before him within reach of his hand. But in moments like this his soul was always filled with bitterness and hatred, bitterness against the whole world. Can't you be happy, Gaspard? What trifling thing is paining you now!

"For this evening—mine—and every night—someone else's—that's what your love is like! On demand!"

"But why are you reproaching me with it? Even if you had the right to—and you haven't. You haven't the right!" Suddenly she pushed him from her angrily. "You can go to the devil! You've no need to reproach me with anything. Come back when you want to give me a castle. Till then I must earn my living like this!"

Gaspard, leaning against the opposite wall, saw her before him, raised against the pillows, angry, escaping from him again. Her dress had slipped off her shoulders, the yellow light of the oil lamp was reflected from her skin, her slim legs were clearly



outlined by the thin stuff of her gown. She was more naked than if she had flung off everything.

"Clear out, will you?" she said angrily and pointed to the door.

The eternal play of forces within! You had love—you have begun to torture yourself and resist it. As soon as it tried to get away from you, you yearn for it again.

"Clear out!" she repeated angrily.

He flung himself on her frantically, covered her with kisses and overpowered her so passionately that the cry of happiness which escaped her was tinged with pain; waves of rapture flowed over her as she lay in his heavy embrace and only murmured softly and monotonously:

"You're wicked—wicked!"

Flooded with a feeling of gratitude he kissed her hands, hair, shoulders.

And she kept murmuring, like the distant ticking of a clock:

"You're wicked! You're wicked!"

"Why am I wicked?" He roused himself suddenly.

"You wanted to run away from me."

"Not from you," he whispered and kissed her hand again, as if she had given him the most beautiful gift.

"Do you still love me as much as ever?" Margot asked wonderingly.

"What d'you mean—still love you?"

"Even—afterwards?"

"All the more," he whispered.

Margot smiled sadly.

"That's because you're inexperienced. You're like a little boy. How old are you?"

"I'm going to be twenty-six. It's quite an age. And you?"

"My dear boy, I'm old already. Eighteen."

"Only eighteen?"

"Eighteen can be old enough." And her voice grew hard and suddenly harsh. But she still went on kissing him.

"Shall we go now?"

"Yes."

They got up. Gaspard was embarrassed and did not know how to give her money, but she solved the difficulty quite simply.

"Can you give me anything?" Margot asked and pressed herself against him again; but carelessly this time, out of mere friendliness.

"Of course." He put his hand in his pocket. He had the three bank notes from Clément. "You understand," he said, "I'd gladly give it you all, but I need it desperately." He handed her one of the notes.

"Can't you give me any more?" she asked from habit.

Gaspard did not take it amiss. Only a grand gentleman who did not know how hard it was to get enough to eat could have felt insulted by her behavior. Folk who earn their living in the streets understand each other, even if one falls on his nose and another on his back.

"You understand," she followed his thought. "I ask you just as I'd ask what the weather's like. If I get more from you, whom I like, I shan't have to sell myself to someone who disgusts me."

"I know," said Debureau with conviction. "And I'll answer you frankly, too. The weather's bad. But don't be angry. I never have any money and I manage to rub along all right without it. But this I've got I need for a friend who's ill and can't pay for a doctor. Some day—some day when I've got some money, I'll come and . . ."

"That's all right," said Margot without rancor. "Let's go down then." She behaved quite naturally to him. The enchantment which had sprung from his desire had faded a little, but he still liked her, all the more since he could appreciate her naturalness.

"You aren't disgusted with me?" she asked as they were going down the stairs.

"No."

"Why don't you persuade some seamstress, salesgirl, laundress . . ."

"I really haven't any money."

"There are ladies who would take you and pay you for it, because you're young."

"No. I don't like rich ladies. I couldn't feel anything for them."

"Oh, you're incorrigible."

Gaspard stood still with her on the threshold of the ante-room.

"I like girls like you."

"In spite of them being yours today and someone else's tomorrow?"

"That doesn't matter. I have such feeling for you—for you all."

"Love for sale—you like that, you silly?"

"I think it's cheaper than from the ones one doesn't pay in money."

Margot gave him a very friendly look and her mouth pouted as if she wished to say something very frank. Her eyes were suddenly closer to Gaspard's, but just then there was a shout from the gaming room. The new expression vanished from her face and she said with a smile, in her other voice, the hard and pitiless one:

"You connoisseur! Well, when you need some cheap love again, come back!"

He wanted to say something more, but the shouting in the gaming room grew louder.

"What's happening in there?"

They hurried through the little room and entered the curtained door.

A crowd of players stood opposite Clément. One glance at the table showed that he had lost heavily. The other gamblers were putting great bundles of notes into their pockets.

"It's true. I saw it clearly!" cried Clément. He pointed at one of the other gamblers. "He made signs to you, telling you what cards I held."

"Clément!" Someone put an arm round him. "You're not going to make a fuss? What are a couple of thousand to you?"

"I won't put up with dishonesty."

"Take care!" said one of the gamblers threateningly. "You're going too far."

The lady whom Gaspard had met on the stairs earlier in the evening hurried from one to the other begging them to keep calm.

"I'll throw him out, and there's an end of it!" said the threatening gambler.

"You will?" shouted Clément. "All right. Then I'll call the police." And he strode to the door.

The company, which had thinned a good deal in the course of the night, was alarmed. The lady and the gamblers were particularly anxious that Clément should not carry out his threat. The lady nudged some of the girls standing near and they ran and flung their arms round him.

"Don't go away! Come and have a drink! Stay here!"

Margot was among them and begged him too.

But the gambler who had started the quarrel refused to be pacified.

"Just you remember we play fair here—and I don't let even my best friend say to my face what you've said!"

"Cheat!" cried Clément.

The man raised his hand and was going to throw Clément out, but Margot hung on his back and bit him in the hand.

"Bitch!" He gave a yell of pain and rage and caught the girl by the throat.

But Debureau was beside her in a flash; he caught the astonished man by the waist and flung him down. The man staggered to his feet and looked round to see who had dared to lift a hand against him. He saw a thin young man looking him firmly in the face. They stood close together, facing each other. Neither moved. Margot was sobbing behind them. The next second might bring tragedy.

"What d'you think you're doing?" roared Gaspard's antagonist.

"Oh, don't mention it," smiled Gaspard apologetically and looked round. It had all happened so suddenly that even the enraged gambler was staring at him as if he were a strange and hitherto unknown monster; instead of striking him he merely waved his hand and said through the corner of his mouth:

"You—prostitute's bully!"

Debureau bowed.

"Take your friend—and go!" whispered Margot.

"Did he hurt you?"

"Nothing to speak of. But go quickly!"

Gaspard took Clément by the arm and drew him from the room. Only the concertina bade him farewell, though cheerful laughter broke out when they were outside and the porter was laying Clément's coat across his arm.

They went out into the street. The night was worn and pale. An ugly dawn was waking in the streets.

"Well," said Clément wearily, "I hope you've had a pleasant night."

"I have indeed, Clément."

"I'm glad. They cleaned me out."

"Of much?"

"About fifty thousand."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Gaspard in horror. "You're raving!"

"Perhaps," agreed Clément. "But it's the truth."

"Then why didn't you call the police?"

"That was the last thing I wanted. 'Your name, Monsieur?' And I should have lost everything here too."

"This is awful, Clément. I've some money here that you gave me—"

"Nonsense," grunted Clément. "It doesn't matter. D'you know," and he flung an arm round Gaspard's shoulder, "one fine day we come to the conclusion that it doesn't matter—nothing matters."

"But you want to live! That's why you come here!"

"Yes," Clément repeated and his head slowly bowed. "I want to live. And that's just why it doesn't matter."

He gave a little smile as if he were swallowing down a mouthful of alcohol, and held out his hand to Gaspard:

"Well, good-by, you prostitute's bully!"

He turned and walked away with uneven jerky steps.

From within the house came dimly the squeak of the concertina.

They were still gambling and perhaps someone was even now leading Margot upstairs to the room with the marbled walls and she was calling him "my dear . . ." And perhaps thinking of Gaspard while she did so. But more probably she was not.

And Debureau stood outside, banished.

"A prostitute's bully!"

## XV

### A NATION IN MOURNING

GASPARD DEBUREAU knocked at the door in the Rue Dragon if possible more timidly than the previous time. For a long time no one opened it. Presently, however, there was a sound of steps.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Victor Hugo, half-opening the door. "Forgive me, I was busy."

"I won't keep you," began Gaspard timidly.

"Please come in. But Eugène isn't at home."

"He's better, then?"

"Perhaps—a little."

"I thought he needed a doctor's care—and advice—and attention—that seemed to be the only thing that would make him better."

"So it is," answered Victor, looking attentively into Gaspard's face. "But I don't understand."

"You see—Eugène lent me two hundred francs some time ago." Gaspard got the words out with a fairly natural expression. "I've come to apologize for not having been able to return them before, in spite of—what you told me last time . . ."

Victor made a gesture of displeasure and Gaspard finished with a rush:

"So I've come to pay it back." And he gave Victor two bits of paper which were warm from his embarrassed clutch.

"Thank you," said Victor slowly and took the money. "I'll give it to Eugène. Or if you would rather give it to him yourself—perhaps this evening . . ."

"No, no, there's no need," Gaspard assured him. But his haste betrayed him.

"Ah!" said Victor and recovered himself. "No, no, Monsieur Debureau, take back your money. We Hugos do not accept charity even from our friends."

It was said very nobly, but it was too much for Gaspard. The tone of voice reminded him of a certain magnificent coach on the road to Marseilles and a bored officer's child lolling on

the cushions. The image forced Gaspard to an answer which he would not have ventured otherwise:

"Possibly, Monsieur Hugo. But we Debureaus do not leave our friends to die without help. Honor's no help to you here—only a doctor can do that!"

He had really said "Debureaus"—even though the word conveyed nothing to him. There was no other Debureau beside himself. But he was sure that it sounded well, Victor's expression convinced him of that. He came close to him.

"You are a man of honor, Monsieur Debureau. Forgive me. I will pay your money—to Eugène's doctor!"

"Thank you." And Gaspard turned to go.

"I should like, if I may, to invite you to—a certain joyful occasion. Adèle and I are going to be married."

Gaspard smiled and then suddenly grew serious.

"Does Eugène know about it?"

"We don't speak of it before him, but he may guess. He's giving more time to his verses just now. I think he is visiting a newspaper editor and one or two authors at this moment. Well, you will come? I'll let you know the exact date."

"Thank you, thank you," stammered Gaspard. It was all that he could manage. Too much kindness upset him and deprived him of speech. Nothing in his life had ever prepared him for it.

"I shall look forward to seeing you. And, once more—thank you!"

Gaspard heaved a sigh of relief when he was on the stairs. It had been a difficult mission.

Even when he got back to the theater he was still thinking of the trick of Fate which by his means was allowing Clément's gift to save Eugène, who had destroyed Clément. But the same day he was caught by a still more powerful eddy of Fate, though he was only on its outside edge.

"Bonaparte is said to be very ill," the actors were saying as they painted and powdered their faces in the dressing room. Gaspard could not believe it. His Emperor! His Corsican eagle! He was more ready to believe that he was on his way back to drive the accursed Bourbons from the throne once more.

The political situation and conditions were becoming less and less satisfactory. Gaspard had no one to initiate him into the mysteries of French internal policy; but he had his wanderings among the common people in the slums, each of whom knew

something, he had his actor friends, who brought the latest gossip, and he had his Béranger.

"Enfin j'ai fait mes affaires ;  
Je suis procureur du roi ;  
J'ai placé deux de mes frères,  
Mes trois fils ont de l'emploi.  
Pour les autres sessions  
J'ai cent invitations."

The Court pursued its policy of repression and censorship. But now and then something would happen which baffled all the efforts of the police. When the hanging committee of the Salon refused all pictures dealing with Napoleon's battles, a certain painter, Horace Vernet by name, arranged an exhibition of about forty Napoleonic canvases in his own studio. It was a pity that Bonaparte himself could not see them. The official Salon was an aching void. A few old gentlemen with lorgnons drifted about there like shells in the sea. But such multitudes of people flocked to Horace Vernet's studio that the place was nearly trampled down. Before the prefect realized what had happened nearly the whole of Paris had been there. There was no bloodshed, but what a demonstration!

Or the Court used its influence to get Béranger condemned. Gaspard went and craned his neck in vain to get a glimpse of his idol. The crowd filled all the streets round the law courts. It is not surprising that the judges were timid in showing themselves and preferred to crawl into the court through a window! They condemned him, but could they suppress his songs as well? Just come and listen when the audience is waiting for the show to begin at the Funambules—the parterre at the back begins to chant :

"Puiser dans la Bible est de la mode :  
Prenons-y le sujet d'une ode.  
Je chante un roi devenu boeuf ;  
Aux anciens le trait parut neuf !"

The front benches answer :

"Le roi se fit à son étable :  
A sa manière il se tenait table,  
Et crut régner en buvant frais.  
Les sots lui prêtaient d'heureux traits."

And that there should be no misunderstanding as to who it was about, and any police officer who happened to be present



should not have his suspicions needlessly roused, the whole parterre joined in the refrain:

"Répétons sur nos harpes d'or:  
Gloire à Nabuchodonosor!"

That was how the people felt towards their betters, and that was the mood in those days.

Gaspard caught the spirit and at once got into touch with his audience. In a scene in "Harlequin in the Graveyard," he played an old general who could not get to sleep when lovers had their meetings in the graveyard, and descended upon them in his nightcap and nightshirt. The nightcap made him the King without the need of adding anything else. There was not a street boy in the whole neighborhood who would not have said on seeing the cap: Hi! There's our Louis!

Debureau's scene was a short one. He clasped his hands, lamenting, and then hurried out again in alarm. The lovers thought he was a ghost. One evening it occurred to Gaspard to vary it a little: he flung his nightcap on the ground and trampled on it, threw a coat round his shoulders, clasped his hands behind him—and strode out firmly with bent head. The appreciative shouts of the audience followed him behind the scenes.

"That doesn't belong there!" complained his fellow actors. "Just you put it in each time," said Félix. "It's all right." And he gave Gaspard a look as he had on the day when he took him back into the troupe.

But on a certain evening in May the Napoleonic scene was not reached. The news of the Emperor's illness took the merriement out of the performance and damped the spirits of all the actors. They played unwillingly.

"What's the matter with you, que diable!" raged Félix. "I'll give your part to Debureau to play next time!" That was the greatest disgrace for anyone in the company.

When the show was half-over and Columbine and Harlequin were fluttering round each other like two butterflies, the door from the street was flung open suddenly and some people rushed into the theater shouting:

"The Emperor is dead! The Emperor is dead!"

The butterflies on the stage let their wings fall to their sides. The audience rose to their feet. The sudden shouting stopped and everything was silent. This lasted a long time. No one made

any sign to his neighbor; but the people there honored the memory of their Emperor as if at a word of command. They were honoring more than the Emperor. His death was a symbol, a symbol of their own liberty, hope, defense. The men and women on the stage and in the auditorium stood without moving.

Then Félix stepped forward as if he would say something but he only put his finger on his lips and shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he might not speak. Then he bowed very deeply—not to the audience but to someone in the distance behind them—and the curtain fell. No one demanded that the show should go on; they all trooped quietly out. The feeling of mourning spread through the streets, and what made it worse was that people were afraid to speak. Each individual walked as if he were following a hearse; thousands of these invisible hearses drove through the city, along the boulevards and through the suburbs.

Gaspard called up the picture of his Napoleon with all his strength, the picture of those two strange meetings long ago in the distant past. Whom have you got now, poor unfortunate folk, leading a miserable existence beneath the spurs of the more fortunate and inconsiderate, to whom can you pray, who will be your comfort? You comforted yourselves with the thought, even if it was not true, that the Little Great Man thought of you, that he loved you and was preparing to break your bonds! Who will be his successor?

He got a glimpse into the soul of the many-faced crowd.

The baker from whom he bought his bread had tears in his eyes. The students whom he passed walked with hanging heads. That evening and next day and the day after only Napoleonic songs were sung; the police remained invisible; they felt it better to avoid the people that day. Even the street girls had dull, empty eyes and did not care for business. Nothing had really happened in the kingdom, nothing had changed, on the surface everything was as it had been before—and yet, what a change! Far away on a rock in the ocean a single man had breathed his last. And what an earthquake in folk's hearts! What a loss! What a new resolution!

That one man who had died on his lonely rock had stamped his image on all hearts. It was still quivering there.

That May evening impressed itself indelibly on all hearts.

## XVI

### THREE PARTINGS

"MONSIEUR GASPARD DEBUREAU is requested to present himself without delay at the mortuary chamber at the Morgue for the purpose of identifying a person deceased by drowning."

The leaden waters of the Seine flow by under the bridges. Human voices float over its waters: the voices of venders of wheat, charcoal and wool, the voices of ferrymen near the Louvre. Long barges laden with timber float by, wafted by the songs of the charcoal burners of Morvan, songs as monotonous as the yellowish-green waters. And still other voices lie silent below the surface, voices, silenced by the depths, on despairing and unhappy lips.

The Seine stretches herself, avid of enjoyment: a dirty harlot. Whom did she swallow last night? Who was lured by the reflection of the gas lamps on the Pont des Arts? But the river gave no answer to the man walking beside her.

Gaspard left the river bank. There was a man who could help him, and he had a right to ask something of him: Clément Sanson.

It was still early. Clément would not have left home; but in front of Clément's house stood a cart laden with furniture. Was he moving?

"Is the gentleman going away?" Gaspard asked two of the mover's men.

"Don't know," they chuckled. "But he won't live here very comfortably now."

Gaspard approached the house. The door was open, so he went in. In the hall he heard a strange voice.

"Is that all?"

"You've forgotten a picture," Clément answered quietly.

"I'm taking that myself."

The door opened and the sheriff's officer came out with a picture under his arm.

A distraint!

"Another creditor?" asked the sheriff's officer as he caught sight of Gaspard, who turned his head away. The sheriff's officer went out and a moment later there was a rattle of wheels.

"That was quick work," said Clément, who was standing in the middle of his ravaged home. "I offered them the guillotine," he added, smiling self-denyingly. "They wouldn't take it."

"They seem to have made a pretty clean sweep."

"If you've come as a creditor, you won't find much now."

"You're right, Clément. I have come as a creditor. I once gave you some help . . ."

"Often."

"Especially once. The time we went with Foulard. I've come to claim payment."

"Have they made you executioner?" Clément smiled uncertainly. "Or do you want to square accounts with a rival?"

"Someone I know has been drowned in the Seine. I've been sent for to go to the Morgue."

"Who has sent for you?"

"The police."

"And what's that to do with me?"

"But, Clément," said Gaspard, mortified. "I'm afraid to go. You must come with me."

"What? Forgive me, my dear Gaspard! I'm off!"

They went out of the house.

"Aren't you going to lock up?"

"What for? They haven't left anything here. A propos, won't you buy the house? What can I do with an empty house?"

"Put it up for sale."

"Perhaps I will. It's not important. I'll go and beg a bundle of straw somewhere and have something to sleep on. But that's not important either. I really have much to repay you. This errand is only in installment."

"You know, it feels so queer when one goes—on an errand like this—quite alone. It's like being very ill when everyone round you is cheerful and well."

"I understand that very well, my dear Gaspard. I've been ill like that a very long time. The world changes completely. If you're well, you walk along smiling. Why, there's the cobbler! Good morning, Mr. Cobbler! How are all your shoes? Then you go on a bit further—why, there's some dried apples, sugar, cheese! What a cheerful-looking lot of eatables! Good morning, dried apples! Good morning, jam!"

"Yes, that's it!" said Gaspard with conviction.

"And then they tell you: I'm sorry, Monsieur, you won't be very pleased—you're what they call fatally ill. And everything changes. The fruit isn't yours any more. Cobblers are quite uninteresting and their attention is claimed by other things. Everyone's a stranger to you and they all seem cruel. Cruel because they're well. Lovely girls don't belong to you any more. Only this belongs to you, doesn't it?" And he put a hand on Gaspard's shoulder.

"You do say it well," nodded Gaspard.

The friendly hand on his shoulder took him all the way to the Morgue. In this way he could not avoid arriving there. Alone he might not have done so.

A wooden doorway led into a dark vestibule. An attendant or minor official, a musty-looking old man, came to meet them and informed them:

"According to the register of missing persons kept by the police it appears that the drowned person is your mother. At least she is wearing the clothes which you described. Of course, she has been in the water a very long time—there will not be much likeness . . ."

She has been in the water a very long time—

"Please!" Gaspard stopped Clément at the entrance to the chilly mortuary chamber and went in by himself.

A black tiled floor. Cold. Cold.

On the table lay a figure covered with a sheet. The old man uncovered the face and body and looked questioningly at Gaspard, whose face stiffened with horror. He looked straight at the featureless face. Never in his life had he seen anything so horrible.

"Is it she?" asked the old man.

"No," said Gaspard, white to the lips.

"According to the clothes . . ."

"No," repeated Gaspard, his eyes still fascinated by the terrible face.

"Are you sure?"

"I tell you it isn't!"

He felt like shrieking it till he brought the whole Morgue tumbling about his ears. He would have sworn it to anybody. His mother was cheerful, clean, smiling. His mother was Madeleine Debureau. Oh, you should have seen her when she put on her red skirt and her silver beads and took the boards! The beginning of the show! His mother had eyes that sparkled; even

when she grew old and walked unsteadily after several glasses of anisette, she was always kind and cheerful. That was what his mother was like.

"It was a mistake, eh?" Clément greeted him at the door.

"Yes. Happily it was not she," said Gaspard firmly. But for all that he turned to the attendant:

"How was the woman drowned?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know? The doctor said either someone pushed her into the water or she fell in when she was drunk. Anything may have happened."

"Thanks."

They went out. It was a hot July day. The sky above Paris was perfectly clear. Both men drank in the light breeze which blew in their faces. Whose idea had it been to set down close to the painful façade of the Morgue the fish market with the cheerful umbrellas of the fishwives? It was a different world.

"It was cold in there," remarked Clément.

"And that black tiling!" said Gaspard.

"Black tiles?" asked Clément, surprised. "I never noticed. The main thing is that it was all a mistake and wasn't your mother."

"Yes, I'm very glad it wasn't she!" said Gaspard and clenched his teeth.

But yonder on the black tiles of the Morgue, under the dirty sheet—Gaspard had quite definitely recognized his mother.

Victor Hugo kept his promise and invited Gaspard to his wedding with Mademoiselle Foucher. But although Debureau had considerably changed his opinion of Eugène's haughty brother, he could not imagine himself in the company of Victor's friends. He thought that the invitation had been sent out of courtesy and that the best way to behave was to excuse himself. At a tavern or a café he could meet anyone. A clown could meet even an emperor in the street. But to sit at a table with them and pronounce educated sentences, not knowing where to put his hands or where to look or what to say—no! But he knew what was fitting; he pawned his overcoat and sent the newly married couple a bunch of carnations.

He thought he would wait a few days and then go and ask after Eugène. But his intention was forestalled by a letter which arrived addressed to the Théâtre des Funambules.

In the envelope was a letter in Victor's familiar handwriting, and a picture which Gaspard did not look at at first.

"DEAR MONSIEUR DEBUREAU,

"I consider it my duty to tell you how Fate has disposed of my brother. Although I know that Eugène did not behave well to you, perhaps it will interest you. On my wedding day something painful happened here. When we returned from the church and sat down to table Eugène, whom we had vainly sought for two days, rushed in and made a dreadful scene. He called down upon us the vengeance of all his diabolical friends and especially reproached me with robbing him of his Muse and his love. It is beyond me to describe the details. It was an unpleasant beginning for our life together and we were very much upset, and of course it had the worst results for Eugène. The doctor whom, through your kindness, I have been able to get for him decided with unshakeable certainty that Eugène must be sent into an institution and, in spite of my prayers, he had his decision carried out at once with the help of the police. When I protested he maintained that Eugène has now gone completely insane. My wedding was apparently the decisive moment. You will certainly understand what a grief it is to me. But the doctor assures me that it is not merely a case of preventing him from harming others, but of protecting his life, which he might easily attempt. According to his detailed examination, Eugène is not master of his thoughts. He is going into the maison d'aliénés at Saint Marcel. The doctor will give me news of him, but has strictly forbidden visits. I considered it my duty to inform you of all this.

"I must also thank you for your gift of flowers, which gave my wife great pleasure. We have a little picture by Monsieur Watteau; it is a sketch for the portrait which is, I believe, in the possession of Monsieur David and represents the Pierrot of Italian comedy. Perhaps it may interest you. I beg you to accept this trifle as a small expression of thanks for your valued kindness.

"Yours sincerely,

"Victor Hugo."

Gaspard stared meditatively at his own image in the mirror which lay before him on the table. But he did not see his eyes, nor the wig surmounting his forehead nor his powdered face. A silent, bitter grief tugged at his spirit. Adieu, Eugène! That is how human lives end. Handsome, cheerful Eugène! He will never joke with the waitress again, never sip his Burgundy! He will whisper his verses to his cold cell, and call up his devils there. That is the end.

And who knows? Perhaps he will find quiet for his troubled

spirit. Perhaps he will become reconciled with his fancies and specters; women will cease to torment him and he will find peace. Or perhaps he will die soon. Adieu, Eugène.

Still pondering, Gaspard turned his eyes to the picture. It was a stiff piece of paper with just a few light lines in pencil and a few experimental dabs of paint. Pierrot? Frédéric sometimes spoke of him, of the Italian *commedia dell' arte*. So this was Pierrot. A white collar, a full white costume with large buttons. The background was washed in in blue just behind his head—perhaps to throw up the face which was touched with white paint.

At first glance it did not look like anything special. It was only after some time that Gaspard thought that the painted face seemed to express grief. He tried showing it to one of the actors.

"That's nothing. He looks like a fool," was the response.

Gaspard looked into the picture as if it were the face of a living person. He looks like a fool! Yes. But the *like* was important.

"Yes, but you know he isn't a fool," he objected.

The actor shrugged his shoulders.

"If it amuses you! Pictures don't interest me!"

Gaspard admitted honestly that pictures did not interest him either, unless there were pretty girls in them or else Napoleon. But this was a present; the first present which he had ever received. And then the expression, just indicated in the few light lines, impressed him. In that foolish expression was a thoughtful forehead, an understanding mouth, a yearning glance. And behind it all a soul. And in the soul a past.

There was something else which he longed to ask, but did not dare. So he only asked his mirror:

"Aren't I a little like that picture?"

Both faces were white. He altered his expression a little, let the corners of his mouth droop and closed his over-reddened lips and opened his eyes wide. And the expression which could not be achieved by the movement of any muscles in his face but which flowed into the motionless features from within, so that you only caught it in the eyes and from the eyes it was reflected on the lips and in the face. Now it was he.

"Debureau!" his call came.

The Pierrot mask vanished and the old general with his red lips and curly hair hurried on to the stage.

But he carried Pierrot in his heart.



He intended to go as soon as possible to see Clément, but he put off the errand for several days. The reason was a fresh outcrop of discontent due to the tightening up of the police regulations.

Workmen when they met told each other how many centimes had been knocked off their wages.

"And all for the milliard des émigrés!"

Besides the seven hundred millions which France had, in blood and sweat, to pay to her victorious enemies, the aristocracy demanded reparations to the amount of one milliard for those for whom the Republic and Empire had meant banishment. This milliard could not be raised in any other way: it had to be squeezed out of the people.

No enactments were too strict; the rebellious heads must be tamed. The thought of insurrection must be driven out at all costs. "What about the Duc du Berry?" was the answer to every attempt at more liberal measures. Thus for the crime of a single saddler's assistant with an unhinged mind, who thought that the murder would save France, millions now had to suffer. The appearance of societies of Carbonari was the cause of renewed and unceasing activity on the part of the guillotine, for which the aristocracy had long been clamoring.

And when one fine day it was known that four sergeants from the fortress of La Rochelle were to be executed for rebelling against their king, it was high time for Gaspard to go in search of Clément.

It was not hard to find him now: Clément hardly left his house. He sat in the window recess and read a few of the books which had been left in the place where the guillotine was kept.

Gaspard thought that he would find him crushed and overwhelmed, and considered how he could help him in face of the impending horror of his fourfold task. But he was mistaken. Clément was in an exceptionally good humor and was wearing new clothes.

"Good of you to come, Gaspard. You'll save me a journey," he greeted him.

"I was afraid I should find you less cheerful than this," admitted Debureau.

"I shall miss you, Gaspard, but it's the only thing I can do." And he held out a line of the long letter which he had before him for Gaspard to read.

"... to comply with this request and release Clément Sanson . . ." Gaspard read.

"You've resigned?"

"Yes, Gaspard."

"And what shall you do now?"

"I'm leaving here. I shall go to Villefranche. I couldn't live here. I shall hire a piece of land and till it. I shall sow and water and reap—be a farmer. I shall start all over again."

"Then you're leaving Paris?"

"Yes. I must. Though I shall be very sorry to say good-by to you."

"To me!" Gaspard waved his hand sadly. "But what about the others? The beautiful and distinguished ladies?"

"No. The only thing I want now is to vanish. I can hardly wait. I hate everything here. And tomorrow—tomorrow I'm leaving. I should have liked to ask you to have supper with me, but I'm afraid I shan't have time. Or would you like to come with me now and help me to do my shopping?"

"I expect you'd rather be alone," said Gaspard. "And who's going to take your place?" he added timidly.

"One of my assistants, presumably. It's all the same to me now." He looked grave.

"Do you think we shall meet again, Clément?"

"I think not, Gaspard."

They were both feeling sad now that the end had come. Gaspard could find nothing to say. How was he to say good-by? Clément was the last living being left to him. And now he was losing even him.

"I wanted—I wanted to ask you—about Italian comedy," he stammered suddenly.

"The Italians? Do they interest you?" asked Clément, surprised. "Of course, your show is imitated from them."

"Ours?"

"Not altogether, but partly. When Louis the Fourteenth formed all the groups of actors at his court into one body and made them into the Comédie Française, the Italians stayed on at the Hôtel de Bourgogne and continued to give their harlequinades. For about twenty years they were not allowed to act because one of them had made unseemly references to the powerful Madame de Maintenon in an extemporaneous skit. But after that they went on playing—it's about a hundred years ago now. You

know their characters, don't you? Harlequin, Scaramouche, Pantaloon . . ."

"And Pierrot."

"Of course, Pierrot. He was the principal one. Even French authors wrote for him. Particularly Drevetière, I believe."

"Plays about Pierrot?"

"Yes."

"Is this Monsieur Drevetière still alive?"

"He's been dead at least fifty years."

"Oh!"

"Did you want to ask anything else?"

"Yes," said Gaspard firmly, "and then I'll say good-by. I want to wish you all the best—in your garden—and everything—out in the country . . ."

"Mon cher, you do understand?" pleaded Clément and embraced him.

"Of course," said Gaspard, mastering the pain which overwhelmed him within. He had so longed for friendship, and he was losing it so suddenly. "Of course I understand. And of course I wish you a better life!"

"And you won't come with me this evening?"

"No, no. I've an appointment."

"Congratulations. Who with?"

"A fair unknown."

"Then we part on a merry note. We won't be sentimental, will we? A merry parting to look back on with pleasure!"

"Yes, a merry parting," Gaspard forced himself to repeat. But he had nothing to look forward to, no new life among the ears of wheat was awaiting him.

"Good-by, then, Gaspard, and good luck!"

"Good luck!" repeated the unhappy Gaspard, like an echo.

"Lest you should forget me altogether—this little book . . ."

"Mon Dieu, and I've nothing . . ."

"And I shall still be your debtor."

"Thank you, Clément."

"Good-by!"

A last look into the dear eyes, misted with tears. A step. An empty street. Good-by, Eugène! Good-by, Clément! The fair unknown is waiting for me. I'm hurrying to meet her. It was a good thing you didn't ask who she was, my friend. I should have had to confess that she was—solitude!

But I am carrying your present to her. A keepsake. The title page? Béranger! How witty of you, Clément.

But in spite of that Debureau walked to the theater feeling downcast. And after the show was over he waited more than an hour in the street to see if his friend would not come for him after all.

But Clément never came.

## XVII

### A NIGHT OF BITTER FAME

GASPARD DEBUREAU was at the end of his strength. He was hard and had a thick skull; he was brave and capable of resistance. He knew how to take heavy blows. But he could go no further. He was exhausted and had nowhere to refresh himself. There was no good left in the world, no friendship. He had lost faith in the conscience of the world. He doubted if anyone cared for justice. At every step he saw nothing but the haughtiness of the mighty and the wretchedness of the oppressed.

A man can fight against all this, but he must have one single being close to him whom he knows possesses at least one good quality. Or maybe someone who is full of wickedness but who loves him. But Gaspard had neither of these. His father and his mother were gone. And he was ashamed to speak of how they died—even to a familiar acquaintance. His brothers and sisters had flown away like migratory birds. One of his friends was in a madhouse. The other was an executioner and had gone away forever. Was anything left? Yes. There was still the hope, the strong and stubborn hope for a measure of fame, a shining leaf of interest, the consciousness that he was something and could accomplish something.

Félix, the great Harlequin of the Théâtre des Funambules, was ill. He had a terrible pain. He lay in his dressing room groaning, with cold compresses on his belly.

"Ah, que diable! Have you heard? Frédéric's going to play Hamlet! Sacré mille diables! And I'm lying here like a crushed dog. Frédéric's playing Shakespeare. That's what he's got for being awkward and falling off the rope and off the horse."

Bertrand, the manager, leaned over him.

"Certainly. But what about tonight? Master it! Be a man! You aren't an old woman. I'm not going to close the theater just for a twinge of pain."

"Idiot!" Félix abused him. "I've either a rattlesnake or a crab in my belly!"

"But the doctor said you'd be able to act."

"Then he's as great a fool as you. D'you think I should be lying here like a piece of wood when I can hear the people trampling on the steps?" He tried to stand. "Ah! I can't, man, I can't! It's like fire. Go for a carriage. Take me to hospital!"

"But the play!" shouted Bertrand. "What about the play?"

"You'll have to change the parts."

"Who'll play Harlequin for me?"

"Wait a minute."

Félix went over all the names one after another and shook his head at each. No, not him. He's too dull. He's got legs like lumps of stone. He's fit for the grave not the stage.

"I know," he sighed contentedly when he had gone through nearly the whole company. "Send for Debureau!"

Bertrand tore his hair.

"You've got a crab in your brain, not your belly!"

"Call him, I tell you!"

"That booby?"

"I won't entrust it to anyone else. Off with you, or your audience'll be running away."

Gaspard appeared looking alarmed. What had he done now? He hoped he could only be fined. Or would they dismiss him at once?

"Gaspard," said Félix, rubbing his belly. "There's my wig and there's my costume. Put them on and come and show me. You're to play Harlequin tonight. I think this is my last hour."

An unkind practical joke, thought Gaspard. Except for a couple of passing glances Félix had never shown him a kindness. He had only been generous in curses, abuse and reproaches.

"Did you hear?" shouted Bertrand.

"Really?" asked Gaspard, amazed.

"Off with you, or I'll fling you out!" Félix threatened.

With a single movement Gaspard caught up the lozenge-patterned costume and the wig. He was at the door in two steps, almost fell down the stairs, flung himself on to his bench and threw off his wig and nightshirt. Three of the other actors who were in the room stared at him as if he were mad.

"Have you gone crazy?"

"I'm—I'm playing Harlequin tonight," stammered Gaspard feverishly.

They began to laugh.

"Then there'll be two Harlequins."

"No—Félix is ill."

"And you're taking his place?" They laughed more than ever and one of them hurried away to find Bertrand, but he collided with him in the doorway.

"Quick, quick!" he shouted at Debureau.

"Then it's true?"

"Yes, worse luck."

Gaspard had on his wig and costume. His heart was banging like the biggest bell of Notre Dame, but a hundred times faster. It seemed almost to burst his breast.

"Couldn't you find anyone better than him?" asked the discontented actor grumpily.

"Félix chose him. Leave me in peace and hold your tongue!" cried Bertrand nervously. "Debureau, take that with you and run along to Félix. Quick, man! Quick!"

Gaspard hurried up to Félix's room with his clanging bell in his breast.

"Oh, God, it hurts so!" groaned Félix, writhing with pain. "Ready?"

"I've just got to make up."

"Hurry up then. I'll talk while you do it. Have you watched me very well?"

Debureau took a deep breath.

"Yes. I watch you every evening from the beginning of the show till the end."

"So you know all my movements?"

"Yes."

"That's all right, then." Félix was silent for a little, then he said gravely: "Now mind, Debureau, and listen to what I say. I'm an honest actor and I'm playing square. I might have chosen a fool, just to show Bertrand that he can't get on without me. But I care about the theater. That's why I've chosen you. You're the one in whom I've the greatest confidence."

"Ah!" burst from Debureau.

"Ah or oh, it doesn't matter. But when you get on the stage just say this to yourself: 'Old Félix knows very well how dangerous it is to show that another man can do as well as he. But he believes in my talent and believes that I deserve it.' Say: 'Félix believes in my talent!'"

"Félix believes in my talent."

"That's it. Now repeat that when you go before the audience."

"Thank you, thank you a thousand times . . ."

"Go to the devil!" Félix cursed him. "Where's the carriage? That devil Bertrand is waiting for me to die so that he can save the cost of the carriage."

"The carriage is here, Monsieur," announced the porter.

"I was mistaken in Bertrand's generosity. I'll wager it's harnessed with dogs."

"I'll help you, Monsieur," offered Gaspard.

"Get on to the stage!" shouted Félix.

The porter, the manager and an elderly ouvreuse helped Félix to the door. On the threshold the eminent actor stopped. "I'd forgotten!" He spat dexterously at the shoulder of the distant Gaspard. "Tu me le payeras, Aglaë." The proverb was a living one among the actors of the Boulevard du Temple.

Félix was gone and Gaspard was powdering his face.

He was afraid, of course. His bowels had turned to water. It was such an important step! Let the heavens fall! I, I, Gaspard Debureau, am playing Harlequin tonight! Harlequin, who was acted by Frédéric and Félix!

But there was no time for anxiety or fear or for the heavens to fall.

Bertrand came back. "We're beginning! On to the stage with you!"

Gaspard spat at his image in the mirror:

"Tu me le payeras, Aglaë!"

The footlights took him in their embrace. He had flung off his feverishness like a coat in the wings. Harlequin stepped on to the stage. Of course he knew the part! He had been through it a hundred times in his mind; he imagined himself in it each evening; it came back to him in all his dreams.

A few bold leaps, a little run after the fleeing Columbine, and he is beside her, sailing round her with floating steps. He catches the rose which she throws and tries to embrace her. Careful, here comes his rival. He must hide on one side.

Debureau leaned against the wings, breathing deeply. Someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was Bertrand, but Gaspard did not see him. He was burning with eagerness to fight. Now he was on the stage again. A somersault—and his rival falls flat on the ground. Harlequin jumps over him and laughs. Gaspard had studied Félix very well; it was so like him that they could not be told apart.



"He's Félix to the life!" grunted Bertrand.

Gaspard was intoxicated. The anxiety behind the scenes subsided. It was turning out all right. One could sit down and breathe.

Gaspard floated on wings of pride. It was a giddy feeling to know that he was the center of all this stage world. All the lights shone to show up his movements. His beloved audience, whom he envied Félix so fiercely, had their eyes fixed upon him, they smiled when he smiled, laughed when he got his own back on Cassandra or snatched a kiss from Columbine, and frowned when he was in danger.

He had never seemed to get through a performance so quickly.

And the love scene! What tenderness he put into his glance; perhaps even Félix himself could not make love like that. For Columbine, haughty and vain as you have always been to me, you are really my secret love—you and other women, of course—but now I am close to you, the lights are dimmed to show that evening is coming on—I sit at your feet and lay my face against your knees. How lovely that stuff of your dress smells! How I have longed to be able to act with you some day! My dream has come true. Do you hear the beautiful words which my eyes are saying to you?

And Harlequin rose from the feet of his beloved, chased the shirted reminder of yesterday off the stage before it was really necessary, and swept Columbine into a dance of triumphant youth.

He could not believe it was the end. Curtain up! he wanted to shout, let's go on! But the curtain flew up of its own accord because the audience was applauding. Just as they did on other nights. No one seemed to see anything strange in it; the prima donna was bowing seductively and blowing kisses into the flattering boxes, thanking the others in her usual manner—only Gaspard Debureau stood staring wide-eyed at the audience. They were clapping. My God, they were clapping. They weren't hissing him. No. They were calling for him. Someone pushed him forward. He was before the curtain, alone with Columbine. They were clapping in front and at the back, clapping and smiling in the boxes. In a box quite close to him was a slim, lovely lady. Gaspard could not see her face, he could only see her small white hands flying together, striking against each other and flying apart again. He realized that he must bow. Gratefully, very tenderly,

he inclined his head. Wherever he dared to look he saw shining, happy eyes fixed on him. There could be no doubt of it. He saw it perfectly clearly. Lots of hands sticking up close to the stage and clapping. Some of the people were going out now, but that glorious noise still came from the back. What were they shouting? "Bravo, bravo!" Oh, thank you, thank you! He would have kissed each one of the hands in gratitude. Fame encompassed him round, the loved one, so long sought after in vain, had come—fame— And suddenly he heard quite clearly: "Bravo, bravo . . . bravo, Félix, bravo, Félix . . ."

Poor Gaspard! They took you for Félix. His throat contracted. How should he tell them that he was Debureau?

"Bravo, Félix!"

He thanked them once more, he had no choice. He had played Félix today, repeated his performance. He had played him so well that the people had not seen who he was. He must be reconciled with the fact. It is cruel when you paint a portrait and someone else signs it, but what is to be done about it? The people are not shouting that they know Félix, they are shouting that I pleased them, captivated them.

A few last shouts.

Or did they only believe in me because they thought I was Félix, who is famous all over this part of Paris? Perhaps they would have hissed me otherwise. No, no. Those white hands in the box were applauding art, not a name. Even if I have only had fame for one night, I have at least had fame!

"Hurry up! You can't stand there bowing till morning!" the lighter shouted to him.

Quite crushed and filled with shame he hurried from the stage. What do you know of an actor's first taste of success, you with your sooty face? Have you ever bowed to the parterre and the loges—and in the part of Harlequin, too? Oh, yes, I could have gone on bowing till morning, and gladly. I've waited for it twenty years. If I told you all about it, you'd certainly stare.

I should have liked to tell you all about it, gentlemen—to tell you what those twenty years were like—thought Gaspard in the dressing room. He waited for someone to say something to him, but they were all in a hurry as usual and talked less than on other evenings. All right, boys, Gaspard exulted. The glory had been his, for here was the faithful companion of fame—envy!

God knows, Gaspard was not malicious, but he would have

liked to fall on his knees and give thanks to Fate. For the first time in his life he actually had something which was envied by others! Up to now he had been the poorest of them all.

The manager, Bertrand, came in.

"Here's a piece of soap for you," he said and put it down beside the washbasin. Gaspard's heart gave a leap once more. What an honor! The manager had never done that for anyone before.

"Thank you, Monsieur Bertrand."

He turned to the basin to show that he appreciated the attention. When he was drying his hands after washing, the manager put a few coins into his hand. Gaspard smiled happily.

"You've been lucky, Debureau," said Bertrand. "It was really Félix to the life—no one could tell you apart."

Gaspard would have liked to say that it was not a stroke of luck—he could do the same every night, but he was ashamed to say so before other people.

"Go and have a drink with it," said Bertrand and went out.

Gaspard stared pitifully after him—as he had at the last bright faces when the curtain hid them for the last time. And now he must hurry and get ready. He must go out into the street and let the people see him. He had waited for it twenty years. He had walked the path of kicks and blows twenty years. For twenty years he had changed one rag for another, one trouble for another, one grief for another. Tonight he would go out into Paris as the Harlequin who had just been clapped and applauded by the whole theater.

"Good night."

He would have liked to ask the others to forgive him, to tell them that he really deserved it and that he could not help it, but they were too much strangers for him to be able to say anything so natural.

"Good night!" And they did not even mean that sincerely.

The balmy and perfumed summer night enveloped him. After the thick air of the stuffy theater and unhealthy dressing rooms it was like a draught of pure spring water. The scent of acacias came from somewhere.

"It was beautiful, Monsieur Debureau, believe me," said a voice behind him. It was the old ouvreuse who opened the doors of the boxes. "And I know a bit about it. You played as well as Monsieur Frédéric."

Gaspard was filled with happiness. He would have liked to

take her in his arms and kiss her, the splendid old woman. But even that he could not do before people.

"Glad you liked it," he said. "Good night."

"Good night, Monsieur Debureau." And the old woman trudged off home alone.

The couple of francs which Bertrand had given him jingled in Gaspard's pocket. Ho, ho! The whole Boulevard is ours to-night, and the side streets as well. What shall we have to drink?

A lady passed him with a gentleman. Aren't you the ones who were applauding me a few minutes ago? If it interests you, my beauty, this is I, I, Debureau, who was admired as Harlequin at the Funambules this evening. It was I who made the people laugh tonight, do you understand?

Suddenly he saw Bertrand coming out of the back entrance of the theater. The porter hurried up to him.

"Monsieur le régisseur!" And he gave him the message from the hospital. It was plain that the news was agreeable. Why, Bertrand was laughing. Excellent. Then Félix was not dying. Everything is all right, thought Gaspard.

"There you see," Bertrand called to him catching sight of him. "You needn't worry anymore! Félix will be able to play again tomorrow!"

"He's—he's well again?" stammered Gaspard in consternation.

"Of course. They gave him a spoonful of oil—and in a few minutes the pain was gone." And he began to laugh again. "They say the cancer hurried into the light of day faster than Félix found comfortable." And he turned soothingly to Gaspard once more. "So there won't be any excitements or extra efforts tomorrow. That's a good thing." He saluted with his stick and walked away. The porter vanished down the stairs.

Gaspard stood motionless, staring at Bertrand's swaying silhouette. He swallowed with difficulty. He was slowly beginning to understand. It was hard to part with everything which he had just won. But he understood now. Something within him was broken, and every thought which rose in him hurt.

He plucked up his courage and hurried after the manager.

"Monsieur Bertrand!"

The stick paused.

"What's that?"

"Monsieur Bertrand—" Gaspard stood before him and

stared at the ground. "I mean—do you think that—that Félix will go on acting Harlequin?"

"Why, of course. The man's as sound as a bell."

"And—for always?"

"Well, I ask you—who else should act it?" and he looked at him inquiringly.

"I thought that . . ."

"*You* didn't think you'd like to play it?"

"When—when you brought me the soap . . . I thought . . ."

"You don't imagine, you fool, that Félix would let you act it? Not once!"

Gaspard fell deeper and deeper.

"And if he were ever ill again . . ."

"I'll have some oil ready for him in his dressing room. Because it's to my interest that Félix should play."

The deeper he fell the more Gaspard had to endure.

"And some day . . . later on . . ." Gaspard whimpered like a child begging for coppers.

"Just you go on acting what you're fit for."

Now he had no words to ask anything more. Only his drooping shoulders were eloquent and his eyes which seemed to bore through the ground. Bertrand recognized it.

"Disappointed? Don't be a fool." And he added gravely: "You mustn't get above yourself. You can imitate someone else; that doesn't mean you're a great actor." He gave him a tap on the shoulder with his cane. "Just you go and have a drink—and be glad that our Félix is coming back to us cured so soon. And au revoir till tomorrow! Put all this madness out of your head." The cane touched his hat once more.

Debureau was left alone again. Every word which the manager had spoken to comfort him fell like a heavy stone on a newly filled grave. There was a living man. Every limb could feel and every stone was saying: It is the end. You'll never get on top again.

And the living man in the grave began slowly to understand that he was dead and that the world had no use for him.

## XVIII

### THE TAVERN "A L'OURS BLANC"

DEBUREAU walked along the Boulevard, but not at all as he had expected to. For a moment he felt tears gathering; but they dissolved like mist and beneath them there was nothing but empty void. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Carriages rumbled noisily past him, lights emerged from the darkness and fell back into it once more—and Gaspard walked on as if someone were propelling him—with long, slow, unsteady steps. He turned corners at random. He was not going anywhere. As though intentionally the night led him into a narrow alley where the houses were tumbling down and poverty breathed from the dark roadway. He stumbled over stones, sometimes a sheet of metal rang under his feet. Weathercocks moaned on the roofs. A girl accosted him—she might as well have accosted a shadow.

How did it all happen? Even the memory of it was confused. Félix lay in his dressing room and called: Come here, Debureau! And he said: You're to act Harlequin . . . Was that really true? Did it really happen? Gaspard understood now. It was a trap and he did not see it. The mysterious and powerful villain who pursued him through the world with an invisible scourge was growing tired of giving him direct blows. He feared that Gaspard was growing insensitive. So he had hit on a new plan. He let him have the thing which he had longed for all his life. He held the thickly spread slice to his nose—and when the hungry wretch sniffed it—he snatched it away again. The poor wretch was to have nothing now. Ah, *mon Dieu*, while he did not know what it smelled like, as long as he only imagined it, it was a torment of uncertainty! But now it was much worse. Tomorrow—what would tomorrow be like?

He would go to the theater. Félix would congratulate him on not spoiling the show. Or perhaps Bertrand would have told him already about the presumptuous clown and his pretensions, and he would only get curses and ridicule. What a butt he would be for the rough jokes of his colleagues! Back to his red nose and his nightshirt—and while Harlequin danced with Columbine he

would play the useless lout. And that would go on night after night! And then he would play a drunkard for a change, or at most a soldier, and then the drunkard again, and then the red nose—always the least important of the cast. The people in the audience would never know that he could do much more and much better things for them. They would never know, because the manager needed Félix. "Are you crazy? *You* act Harlequin? You're not an actor! You're not an actor!" That was how it was. He was simply a clown and must remain one.

Never again, never again would he see those slim white hands held out towards him, rewarding him. Never again would he bow before the curtain or thank the bright and smiling faces which were offering him their applause.

Never again!

A scornful, ironical mood took possession of him. Just fancy! He had dared to raise his eyes to Harlequin! Would he get a few kicks to bring him to his senses? What was he thinking of, to put himself on a level with the divine Félix? Perhaps he would like to go to the Odéon and offer to play Hamlet instead of Frédéric. So that was he, the presumptuous ass. A vagrant, slouching along over the cobbles, a silly tramp with empty pockets and an empty head—and did he want to be an actor? Perhaps he would like to climb up Notre Dame. He had fallen from the stage, perhaps he might manage to hold on to the tower. He would become more famous that way than by playing on the boulevards.

He walked on for a long time. Now and then he noticed that he had come back and was passing the same houses. He stumbled over the same stones. He noticed the same lights.

No, he had no courage left—to be hissed again, buffeted again. He could fight no longer.

Coward, the yellow lights of a tavern said to him. Come and get a bit of extra courage if you have not enough in your heart. Songs and laughter floated out to him through the yellow panes. He glanced round. Ah, it was the Rue des Ours. It was not far from the theater, so he had been going round in a circle. And what was this tavern? A l'Ours Blanc.

He pressed the latch, feeling in his pocket with his other hand for the few francs which a certain ridiculous sham Harlequin had earned tonight. Not Harlequin. A copy of him.

It was a small tavern with bare walls and a trampled floor, but for all that it gave an impression of coziness, it was so full

of groups of people who seemed quite at home and comfortable, filling the place with thick clouds of smoke and the scent of cheap perfume. The steam of hot cider rose from cups on the table. Vin d'Arbois, announced a large notice over the bar.

The people whom Gaspard could see from his table were not vagrants and workmen throwing dice as he had expected. At the table next him were two men who were obviously teachers of fencing; their fencing sticks were crossed one upon the other under the table. Behind them sat some of the King's gunsmiths, to judge by their uniforms. On his other side a dozen youths were passionately disputing some literary problem, for nearly all of them had books in their hands and were backing up their arguments by hastily sought quotations. Right at the back, near the bar, sat Fancioulle, a well-known vaudeville actor of the quartier, with his wife. There were a few other women there, apparently the sweethearts of the disputing students, waiting till their cavaliers had finished their debate and supporting themselves meanwhile with little glasses of cherry brandy. The tables against the wall were almost invisible in the thick tobacco smoke, only from time to time the popping of a cork showed that people were there, too.

The specialty of the tavern was the masked waitresses. When a girl in a blue mask came and stood beside Gaspard's table he almost got up and ran away. It was a living reminder of the game which he had lost. At another time he might have smiled indulgently. But today it was more than an echo of the stage and of Italian comedy; it almost seemed to embody the future whose face he could not see. The other guests were apparently accustomed to it. But Gaspard watched every step of the strange dark-haired girl—there were two others beside her, but their masks did not become them—and when she returned he stared half-boldly, half-fearfully, into her eyes as if he would read his fate in them. They seemed to be half-closed and smiling. Was that a good omen?

Disputing voices reached him.

"Gas is to blame for it. Gas!"

"Nonsense!"

"One fire after another. That didn't happen in the days of oil."

It was a group of theatrical guests who were quarreling about the lighting in Paris theaters, which was an attraction, but a considerable danger as well. There was a fire every week.



The fencing teacher who was sitting behind them joined in. He spoke in a deep, serious voice almost like a preacher of the Gospel.

"My young friends, there are other fires at the theater, besides those of which you speak."

"What?" They turned in surprise.

"Fires in the soul!"

Two young girls laughed; only the others turned to him attentively. The tavern was certainly patronized by educated people who had their own ideas about art, even if they did not wear yellow gloves and a lorgnette.

"Fires in the soul?" one of the students challenged him.

"Have you seen Talma as Richard of Arlington?" asked the fencing master slowly. "Is not that a fire? You sit in the audience, and when the stage is lit and he appears in his wet cloak, something begins to glow faintly within you. The man on the stage catches fire, and the first little flames leap out in your soul. He burns, and you burn with him. It is a struggle between life and honor, and within you is a forge, heated to white heat. Honor wins! Everything wicked and worthless within you is destroyed. And when the struggle is over and Richard of Arlington on the stage sacrifices himself to honor—the flames slowly die down. But the conflagration leaves no blackened ruins. Everything evil has vanished—a pure soul is left, cleansed of cobwebs and dirt. Everything was devoured in that glorious fire. Those are the flames that I know, my friends."

The smoke hovered over the tables like undulating sheets, forming a light blue baldachin above the heads of the drinkers. Everyone was silent as if after a real sermon.

The warm air filtered into Gaspard's heart; mists hid him. See—that is what art can give. That is how an actor on the stage can be a magician. His words go deep into his audience and regenerate them. He creates heroes before their eyes as an example for them to follow. He creates base knaves as a terrible warning.

The girl in the blue mask let her eyes rest rather curiously on the man sitting alone.

"Another bottle?"

"Yes." Gaspard jingled his remaining francs. It was the money which the public had given him for kindling flames within them; it should be used to kindle flames in him now. Two bottles of vin d'Arbois were the payment for one evening in the part of

Harlequin. It was a great deal; but Gaspard would gladly have paid it if they would have let him act.

Two bottles of wine were enough for Harlequin, and they were enough for Gaspard too. His face grew restless, his features blurred. At times he felt inclined to laugh, at other times he nearly began talking.

"You are right, maître," a small gray-haired man with an ardent voice commented on the fencer's sermon. "When I feel the worst, I go to the theater; I go home afterwards another man. I want to equal what I have seen. For days I carry within me something of the hero whom I have seen. And I say: 'Jules, be like him! Do not be like the fools and knaves whom you saw.'"

"The theater is a wonderful thing. It is a worldly temple in which human thought returns to honorableness," declared the fencer.

Yes, thought Gaspard in his soul; if simple folk like these can be so touched by it, it certainly is.

Fanciouille seemed to think that he had been silent long enough. He picked up his guitar and began to pluck the strings.

"D'you know what to play, Fanciouille?" someone called.

He nodded his head with a melancholy smile.

"Sure you've got it right?"

"Yes." And he began to thrum a melody. The bowed heads of all the company showed that he had made no mistake.

"Dieux! le pilote a crié: Sainte-Hélène!  
Et voilà où languit le héros!"

In Gaspard just then melancholy overpowered gaiety. He was not looking into the eyes of the dark-haired waitress now. Ha, lovely mask . . . I know you. You're the future. You hide yourself from me in smoke—dirty yellow smoke the color of the Seine. Brrr! The idea made him shiver. No, it's not the Seine, it's the sea. It's the sea with a ship sailing on it.

"Bons Espagnols, que voit-on au rivage?  
Un drapeau noir! Ah, grands dieux, je frémis!  
Quoi! lui mourir! O gloire! quel veuvage!  
Autour de moi pleurent ses ennemis."

Un drapeau noir. Gaspard's soul was on the waves. His eyes were dim from staring at the dizzy depths over which he was sailing. Before him rose a rock with a black flag. He was dead. Who?

"Fame is a deceitful thing and not everyone is born for it. Even Talma is going, and his fame will die. And he is one by himself! How much labor, how much effort, how much luck he has needed."

"And how much happiness he has given to others!" Someone answered and raised his glass. "To his health! The health of Talma! Thanks for all he has given us!"

They all rose and lifted their glasses.

"For Richard!" said the gray-haired man and they all drank.

"For Hamlet!" said another and they all drank again.

"Drink with us, Monsieur!" cried one of the students to Gaspard almost threateningly. "Or perhaps you don't like Talma?"

Gaspard gulped and stood up.

How gladly he would have said: Yes, I love him—and I, Messieurs, I want to be another Talma, someone to whom you will drink and say—thanks for all you have given us! To be the Talma of pantomime! How glorious that sounds! The Talma of pantomime!

"For Othello!" said the student and they all smiled and drank.

Gaspard drank a last glass and his eyes were burning. For Debureau would always be the stupid, ugly, evil lout of whom the people in the taverns would say: Mind and don't get like him!

More and more names hovered in the smoke, each of them meaning a great and beautiful gift—and Gaspard drank with tears in his eyes because he suddenly saw before him the desperate barrenness and uselessness of his whole life, which had never helped or enriched anyone.

"For the Cid!" cried someone else and again they all stood and drank to the great man.

But before Gaspard a black flag was still flying—it was his one goal, his one starting point.

"For Harlequin!" he cried suddenly in a tearful, obstinate voice. They all turned and looked at him, but he did not see them. He finished his glass, threw a handful of money on the table and stumbled to the door. His chin was trembling and his eyes were full of tears.

"Never! Never! Never!"

The people round the table burst out laughing. They stared at him sympathetically, some of them rose and would have helped

him, but he fell heavily against the door, pushed it open and vanished.

His "never!" hung over the folk in the tavern like a reproach, an unheard entreaty—

The waitress in the blue mask closed the door.

"He had drunk too much," said the fencing master solemnly. "Perhaps he had troubles to drown."

XIX  
SUICIDE

GASPARD set out once more on his pilgrimage through the streets of the dreary slums. His walk was more staggering and uncertain even than before. Beside him walked another drunken man: the clown from the Funambules with his red nose and shirt: the eternal drunken man of all pantomime—a figure which did not give the people either warmth or light, not even laughter, and which was only created to form a target for kicks. They walked along together. The one was unhappy and broken; and the other was bold and importunate.

Behind the windows which he passed, people were sleeping—married couples comfortably side by side. Others, perhaps alone, but when they got up in the morning they would meet familiar faces. Only he whom the whole world had rejected would never find anyone. The people behind those windows had wives, parents, children. Only he had no one. Life had reft from him one dear one after another: father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends. And Gaspard still did not understand.

As he turned a corner a young man sprang out to meet him, a drunken, ugly man. Now they stood facing each other. Only a faint light from a distant street lamp fell upon them. But they both recognized each other. The high, obstinate forehead, the hair clinging close to the skull, the eyes full of longing, the mouth twisted as if on the point of tears. So it's you, said Debureau, and the man before him said it after him. It was a reflection in a mirror in a perfumery window, a mirror fastened to the wall and cracked with a masterly shot from a stone or stick. But Gaspard could see quite well. So it's you again? You've crawled into my path once more? Are you thrusting your tear-stained face upon me? The yearning vanished from the eyes of the figure in the mirror and they filled with hatred. Yes, I hate you too! I hate you too! Your thin, expressionless lips, the bones of your temples, your obstinate, warning eyes—and chiefly your weary, stupefied expression. Do you know who you are? Not Harlequin! Not Harlequin—but Pierrot, the clown in the sketch, which was

sent to you in derision. The clown with the stupefied, expressionless face. You look awful, Gaspard Debureau, you fool, you Pierrot, you jack-in-the-box!

He stared at himself with a long and penetrating gaze, and the figure opposite him stared back. He cowered before the silent judgment of those piercing eyes. And now the end.

Aha—what was that? Something new—something new—He was afraid to move a single feature. It is not Pierrot now, it is someone else. What expression is that and where have I seen it? A black flag waved over him. Yes, it's he. And suddenly he remembered and recognized the face.

It was the face of Isidor Foulard going to his death.

Something quivered within him. Now he would gladly have moved, gladly have scattered the image, but he could not. It was as though a marble mask lay on his face, the mask of a man who is saying farewell to the world and going to his death.

But it was awful—it was a lie—it could not be true! Gaspard was horrified. The face was quite clear to him now. He cursed the repulsive skill of his own face which could express the most hidden feelings! Someone else might not have recognized it in him. But he could. He saw the last moments of Isidor Foulard.

If that moment is in his face now—it means—it—means—

He wanted to rush away, vanish, tear his face to pieces, tear the awful confession out of it, but instead of that a great and immovable certainty suddenly fell upon him.

His face told him that he was capable of this thing. It told it him for the first time. And his face never lied.

That meant—

He turned and looked round for the black flag.

He left his image and took a few steps down the street. Before him was an ugly silhouette of a great monster on several feet. Under the creature's paws the sky was turning pale.

The Pont d'Austerlitz!

Saint Helena!

The bridge rail glistened dimly. Everything near the river looked unhealthy and slimy, the sky, the shore, the river. A stink of fish rose from the water, and Gaspard's stomach turned. He leaned over the balustrade and was sick. He walked on a little, disgusted with himself. He felt ill from so much wine on an empty stomach and sick of his troubles. The whole universe was turning round him. Bitter saliva made his own breath loathsome.

The houses bowed down. The bridge, the Pont d'Austerlitz, danced like a bear on its monstrous paws. The lights hurt his face. He was ill, ill. He turned upside down and was looking at the world with his eyes turned upwards.

He walked slowly down the narrow stony path to the river. Close to the water's edge was a little jetty for mooring small boats. There were vendors of fruit and wood there in the daytime. The jetty ran right out under the bridge. Under the Pont d'Austerlitz.

Gaspard had to go out there. He did not know why. The face in the mirror told him to go. The world is not worth living for. The world is loathsome. He sees it all clearly now. Everything is slimy, wretched, useless—dirty and covered with spittle.

He was under the bridge. How did you feel, Mother, when you went down to the river? Did the stench of rotting fish and dead cats turn your stomach too? Did everything heave before your eyes like this? Or did you go to meet this gaily, with a song on your lips? But you still had a son, Mother. Your son has no one. You left him nothing. Only this road which leads to the Morgue.

The black cold paving—a moment of hesitation. He looked round like a shipwrecked sailor. If only a flicker of hope would appear! But everything round him was black. And before him, as far as he could see, all was black. Nothing good, nothing beautiful. Only hatred and filth. And the devastating feeling that all was in vain, which gnawed him to the bone.

A black mirror with yellow gleams reflected. The Seine is beautiful at night, more beautiful than anything on her banks.

The last look.

But suddenly he heard footsteps under the bridge.

"Give it to me!" cried a woman's voice. "You promised me fifteen!"

"Shut your mouth!" answered a man's voice, "or I'll hit you!"

Gaspard smiled ironically. A worthy accompaniment to this moment. Obscene, dirty, slimy people.

"Take what you can get, rob me, and then knock me about!"

"Come along, you bitch—"

A third voice intervened.

"Look there, Adolphe won't keep quiet even at night. He fools the fishes in the day and women at night. It's just his little way, Mademoiselle!"

"You clear out!" roared the first man.

"You stole my pair of scales today."

"Me? And who pinched my place, I'd like to know? You, you dirty dog."

"Clear out, I say, Christophe!"

"You shout at your kids, man, not me—"

"A poor fool like you—"

Gaspard looked towards the light at the end of the bridge. Two rough, unshaven faces, the worst faces in the slums. Now the girl came up. Obscenity reeked from her.

"I'll tell you one thing, Christophe," said Adolphe offensively, "you're a hog."

"And you're a thief, a sot and a crimp."

"You're both hogs—" screamed the woman.

Gaspard shut his eyes as if someone had spat in his face, tottered a little and fell sideways into the water. There was a splash and a shower of spray. Strong wet hands took him by the throat and began to press it. He struggled and tossed. A strange, new, starry light—a rushing noise, darkness, light, a rushing noise—

The end—darkness.

The rushing noise grew less and stopped. A sound of splashing—splashing. What's that? Does it sound like that at the bottom?

Human voices.

"His eyelids are moving." A woman's voice.

"Then it'll be all right now," said a harsh voice, broken by a cough. "I tell you, Adolphe—it was only just in time!"

"Just in time, grâce à Dieu," agreed the other.

"He's only a boy. Why did he give up hope?" said the woman pitifully.

"Some misfortune. It happens so easily. Young people are so reckless.

"Reckless. You're right. 'I'll drown myself—' And off they go—and it's all over."

"And it's all over," repeated Christophe like an echo.

Gaspard opened his eyes. The light hit him like a blow and he closed them again tightly. He had a horrid feeling in his throat. He coughed and brought up a lot of water.

"There, it'll be better now you've got rid of that," said the woman's voice soothingly and someone's hand stroked him gently. Gaspard spat out water and spluttered.



Finally he ventured to open his eyes. He was lying on the floor. He could see his legs. His trousers had been taken off and he was wrapped in a coat. A blanket was thrown over him as well. But he had no jacket and no shirt. Something like a curtain was wrapped round his shoulders. A woman was kneeling beside him. Slowly, with eyes still half-closed, he sought her face. It was vaguely familiar. Where had he seen her before? His brain slowly began to clear. Why had he not got his own clothes on? Why was he in these rags? And this face. It was an ugly face with a low forehead, covered with freckles, and with thick lips and untidy hair. Suddenly it flashed through his brain. The bridge! The light on the bridge! The quarrel, the men and the woman! That face—the ugly face and the harsh voice.

He looked at her again and she smiled. Gaspard let his eyes rest on her adoringly. When she smiled she looked like the Madonna—she had something so good and kind in her eyes.

"Is he better now?" asked a voice behind him.

Gaspard tried to raise himself on one hand, but the curtain fell away from his shoulders.

"That's all right, it doesn't matter before us," one of them laughed. Gaspard could see him as well now. Yes, they were the same people—the riffraff under the bridge who had come with their vulgar brawl to add zest to his suicide.

But then he started. What had happened, then?

"Then you—I—" he stammered uncertainly.

"Well, we couldn't leave you there, man, could we?" said the first man, the crimp. "Fishes belong in the river, not men. You'd have had a bad night there."

"So you pulled me out?"

"Well, I didn't exactly do it myself," said the man, "but Christophe's a swimmer."

Gaspard saw that Christophe too was wrapped up in rags. Some wet clothes were drying above a stove in the corner.

"You?"

Christophe—he was the man who had received the title of hog—looked down in embarrassment and his ugly, red and pock-marked face had a look which might have caused anyone else to laugh.

"Well—it's like Adolphe said. The river's no place for a boy like you."

"Did your girl walk out on you?" The woman joined in the conversation once more. "The more fool she!"

"I'd really like to know what made you go and do a fool thing like that?" said Adolphe. He had a red face too and it was overgrown with red stubble. He would have been splendid in the part of a bandit chief in a puppet show.

"Why did you do it?"

Gaspard had to consider. But things were not clear in his head yet. He still heard the rushing sound at times and a kind of whistling. The past was all confused. It would be some time before he remembered things clearly.

"You were in too much of a hurry," was Christophe's verdict.

"Where am I?" asked Gaspard.

"This is Christophe's place," said the red-haired bandit chief.

"Is he the one who took your place?" asked Gaspard, following the thread of his own thoughts.

"That's him, the dirty swine," said Adolphe placidly.

"And what's that noise of splashing?"

"Why, that's his stall on the water. It used to be at least five yards further away. And early this morning he punted it up here. It's no use saying anything to him." And he waved a hand.

"Just a step or two," Christophe growled into his wet rags.

Gaspard looked at them and gradually a secret happiness overwhelmed him.

"If you knew them," said the woman, "you wouldn't be surprised. They're the greatest pair of blackguards on the whole riverside."

"And they—" He was ashamed to say "stole from you" so he went on, "—you were quarreling, too—about—out there—"

"Did you hear it all? I had to yell at the top of my voice. Adolphe would rob a blind man of a light."

"When a man's poor he must keep what he can get." Adolphe shrugged his shoulders in excuse and smiled cunningly. "But I hurried down the steps, what? I got down first!"

"Did you!" snarled Christophe venomously. "You were the first on the bank all right. But who was the first in the water, you camel?"

"Camels don't go into the water," explained Adolphe. "You were there for that."

"There, you see!"

"It was very good of you," said Gaspard, though he was not yet convinced that it was so. They had thwarted his intention, but he admitted to himself that he was not sorry. These brutes,

of whom he had been afraid, while their wordy battle was raging over his head, had something impressive about them.

"Not a bit of it," protested Christophe with his embarrassed smile.

"Yes, it was, he's quite right," insisted Adolphe and added royally, "and of course I'll give him back his scales tomorrow."

Both men smiled, and it seemed to Gaspard now that all three of these humble and disreputable folk were saints. A halo of kindness and goodness emanated from their rough features.

"Now you've fished out a guest you might knock the neck off a bottle," Adolphe suggested to the master of the house.

"No, I don't want wine," Gaspard said with a shudder.

"Well, there's the other guests here," smiled Adolphe.

Christophe got to his feet in his extraordinary costume and took a bottle from the shelf.

"What stream did this float down on?" asked Adolphe with a suggestive movement.

"Sh!" Christophe indicated Gaspard.

"And what are you?" the girl asked him. She was still kneeling by him on the floor.

"I'm an actor," Gaspard whispered brokenly, and waves of fear for the future flowed over him again.

"A comedian?"

"Yes."

"Fancy wanting to drown yourself," said Adolphe wonderingly, "when we have so little entertainment anywhere. There did use to be the times when you couldn't go a step without bumping into a circus or an acrobat or a conjurer. Nowadays a fellow sees them here and there—but they're nothing much."

"What do you do?" asked the red-headed man with interest. "Can you get rabbits out of a hat?"

"I'm afraid I can't," said Gaspard regretfully. "I act at a theater. On the stage."

"Ah, I know," said Adolphe, beaming. "I like the theater. When the Italians were playing here I was able to get in for nothing. But I expect you act sad pieces in your theater, what?"

Gaspard nodded.

"I like sad pieces," announced the girl on the floor. "I like to cry at the theater. When someone dies. Or when the lovers don't get each other." And she added in a little burst of confidence, "My name's Justine."

Gaspard was feeling better and better among these people, quite at home, in fact.

"What's the sense of that?" asked Christophe skeptically. "I think conjuring rabbits out of a hat's the best turn." He and Adolphe drank out of two chipped glasses. Adolphe wiped the rim after him, poured out some more wine and handed it to Justine.

"Won't you have some?" she smiled at Gaspard.

"No."

He did not want wine, but he could not stare enough at these three radiant faces.

"He's asleep," whispered Justine and settled his head more comfortably. "Poor boy."

"I expect he's in a pretty bad way. We must see what we can do for him, mustn't we, Christophe?"

"That's a stupid question. Of course we shall."

"Well, don't fly in a rage at once, man."

"I'm not in a rage. Sh!"

"Sh!" agreed Adolphe. "I'm going to have a sleep now, what about you, Justine?"

"I'm going too."

"Where are you going?" asked Christophe. "Stay here. You've nowhere to go, anyway."

"She could come to me," suggested Adolphe.

"Not likely. You don't know how to behave. And then—if I'm here I can help him—when he's slept it off."

"All right," agreed Adolphe. "But don't run away in the morning, Justine. I'll bring you what I owe you."

"Oh, I don't want anything. I'm so glad we managed to fish him out," and she gently pushed back the hair from Gaspard's forehead.

For Gaspard had fallen into a sleep of exhaustion—angels watched over him.



## PART II



## I

### SPEECH WITHOUT WORDS

LOUIS XVIII died.

The people heard the news with as much interest as a man hears that his neighbor has lost his dog. That was the extent of their sorrow. They had been much more deeply moved by the execution of four cadets from La Rochelle, on the very day that the Court was celebrating the birth of a daughter to the Duc de Berry. When the executioners left the wretched bodies lying in the square till sunset, the effect was the reverse of that intended by the man who gave the order. Folk walked past silently as if in church, uncovering gravely; their looks and greetings, hat in hand, held a gloomily comprehending pity.

Charles X succeeded to the throne.

As far as the people were concerned, his government was lost from the first day. The fact that in his oath he had omitted the sentence about toleration spread through the city with the speed of the steam locomotives which were then making their trial trips. People awaited developments as they wait to see if a bully will follow up his threats. Charles, an ugly, withered little man, actually threw himself at the archbishop's feet during the coronation. A few days later he had himself ordained a priest and celebrated mass on every suitable occasion. The power of the Church increased; processions vied with one another.

The people's sole defender was Béranger—still Béranger. He and his friends became a power which was respected. When the Court demanded money for an expedition against Spain, Senator Manuel, Béranger's best friend, refused. "You shall have nothing. You are costing France more than the Emperor would have cost her in twenty-five years."

"We will tell that to the King," said the Ministers.

"What king do you mean? That agent of foreign powers?" said Manuel boldly. He was arrested, of course. But the whole town rang with the story, it was like the good old days when there was still honor and heroism in the world. Monsieur de Rochejaquelin instructed Sergeant Mercier to arrest Monsieur



Manuel. The good sergeant was puzzled, it was beyond his comprehension. Suddenly he made up his mind and instead of the formula of arrest he commanded his men: "Salute!"

"Bravo, Mercier!" the people greeted him in the street. "Sergeant Mercier is to have free entrance!" shouted the crier outside the Théâtre des Funambules.

At a review of the Garde Nationale, when the King expected a welcome the crowd shouted "Vive la Constitution! Down with the Ministers! Down with the Jesuits!" Paris appeared to be going about its business just as usual, but underneath something kept throwing out shoots and pushing up to the surface. Now and then there was work for the sabers of the police and a couple of lusty youngsters from the workshops lost a little blood for a hazy ideal of liberty; but the ground was not yet prepared for rebellion.

There was something else which helped this hidden germination and began to be reflected more and more in the spiritual life of la ville lumière; it was the struggle of the young romantic school against the old-fashioned classicism, a successful revolution. Gaspard took no direct part in this; he only learned of it from the talk of the more initiated among his colleagues and from the debates in *Le National*, *l'Impartial* and *Le Journal*. In all the recent happenings he avoided company which would have been even a little above him. He had no faith except in people of his own class. He had heard or read that Victor Hugo had an allowance or pension, perhaps direct from the King, but he took no further interest in him. But what he did know of the new romantic movement took his fancy. His whole nature predisposed him that way, his whole life was a preparation for it. The dawning age needed Debureau and he was ready for it. He needed no theories, he did not need to change himself in any way, to prepare himself or alter his course. No: he was there, just as he had to be. The age which called forth de Musset, Gautier and Hugo also gave birth to Debureau.

At this time de Musset was eighteen. George Sand had just arrived in Paris. Dumas was writing *La Reine Margot*. Borel and Sus were lounging about the cafés of Paris, searching for their types. Gautier was trying on his fancy waistcoats and coats, and Nerval was acting Faust. Hugo was standing before Notre Dame and working out the first sketch of his novel. Talma was dying and with him the old, finished style of declamation, and with it the whole of the old-fashioned theater.

Romanticism was rising up against the old oppressions on all sides.

When Gaspard came home on that night of despair which only by a miracle failed to be his last, he had won courage, assurance and serenity. Each step filled him with the certainty that life was fine, if it was not actually beautiful. He kept on feeling as if he had just come up out of the river under the bridge and was looking about the world with the water still trickling out of his eyes. At first he did not know what gave him this feeling of peace. Apparently it was just the assurance of being alive at all. And all the time he felt that he was going in the right direction.

He went to the theater and played the part of the drunkard without his usual despair. He flung himself more than usual into the rough horseplay. Perhaps there's some poor devil here who may enjoy it.

"Good," said Félix, who had recovered.

"Oh, no," answered Gaspard. "I think it should be quite different."

"Revolutionary!" Félix cut him short. "You shall tell me about it tomorrow."

"Oui, monsieur," Gaspard promised without realizing what.

After the performance he went out quietly. He was at peace with himself. But his mind was working. How do I think it should be? What should I really like to act on the stage? He took the shortest way to the Seine. He went the same way as his despairing journey of yesterday, but no memories disturbed his peace. He was resolution incarnate.

"Ahoy! Is that you, Gaspard?"

"Yes! Is Christophe there, too?"

"Yes. We're waiting."

Gaspard hurried down.

The pock-marked Adolphe and carrotty Christophe were better dressed than before, it seemed to him. Christophe's face betrayed a faint-hearted attempt at a shave; unfortunately it had obviously been given up as a bad job. A pair of scales stood in state beside the table. The promise was fulfilled and the stolen goods returned.

"Well, how are you, boys?"

"We've been on tenterhooks. We thought you might have had another daft idea—so we went and had a look at the river . . ."

"Not on your life! And what now?"

They did not know.

"You said you'd come and have a look at us. So we were waiting."

"You saved my life. I'd like you to save it altogether."

Christophe glanced through the door to see if Gaspard wanted to drown himself again.

"No, not that," smiled Gaspard. He took a small picture out of his pocket. "What do you think this is?"

They peered at it intently, turned it this way and that way and upside down, but only shook their heads.

"Some fool or other," they decided at last.

Debureau shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps it is a fool. How do you like him?"

"There's nothing to him," was Adolphe's opinion.

"Now look at me. . . ."

Both Christophe and Adolphe seemed really worried as to the sanity of the man whom they had rescued.

"Do I look like the fool in the picture?"

"Why, I believe you do," answered Adolphe hesitatingly.

Gaspard winked.

"I'd like to play Pierrot, you know."

"What's that?"

"That fool."

"But he looks only half-baked."

"Now watch, and you too, Christophe. Look at me! I'm only a half-baked fool, am I?"

"So you say."

"And now?"

Gaspard slowly altered his expression. His eyes widened, his mouth partly opened as if to cry out, then dropped unable to make a sound—deep creases in one cheek—

"What are you scared of, Gaspard?" asked Adolphe anxiously.

The forehead was lined with furrows. Terror was in the eyes. The mouth trembled.

"Gaspard!" Christophe was alarmed; he almost shouted, "Who are you afraid of?"

Gaspard's face broke into smiles. His eyebrows went up roughly, like those of a servant who has cheated his master. The lips were pressed together and chin thrust out, the corners of the mouth twitching as if working up for something.

Adolphe was the first to understand and challenged him:  
"You play actor!"

Gaspard pretended to be grieved. His head dropped forward a little on one side and he gazed at Christophe as if trying to rouse his sympathy for the death of a dear one. Christophe gazed helplessly at the grief-stricken face. His face involuntarily took on something of Gaspard's expression. And just as a look of sympathy was dawning in his face, Gaspard's foot tweaked the chair from under him and Christophe rolled on the ground. The red-headed raftsman was not pleased at that, even from a man whom he had pulled out of the water! While Adolphe roared with laughter, he picked himself up and ground his teeth. What's up? Gaspard gazed at his shoulder in surprise. One hand was at his mouth, his eyes stared gloomily. What's that? Gaspard went up to him and gently brushed the dust from his shoulder. Now he pretended to be so willing and anxious to please that Christophe could not help smiling. Adolphe chuckled all the more. Gaspard suddenly started and turned to him. Both burst out laughing. Gaspard gave Adolphe a thump on the back. Adolphe was about to hit back when he felt a hand in his pocket; he made a grab, but too late; Gaspard had the knife in his hand. Adolphe frowned; he did not see the joke. But Gaspard was staring at him again in astonishment, shaking his head reproachfully, and suddenly his face was the face of the fool in the picture.

Then the mask vanished and it was Gaspard Debureau once more.

"At your service," he said, bowing. He returned Adolphe's knife and picked up Christophe's chair.

"He knows how to do it," admitted Adolphe.

"I should say so," added Christophe.

Gaspard was impressed by what they said. Molière used to read his plays to an old servant. Why should not he try out his ideas on his new friends, even if they were thieves and rascals? They understood the world none the less.

"What d'you think of it?"

"Well, you know, it's not so bad, but we don't understand. You must ask the theater folk."

"No, Adolphe. What I want is to know what *you* think! The theater folk don't talk to me. And supposing they let me try it out and I disappointed them, it would be all up with me. Besides, I'm not acting for them; I'm acting for chaps like you."

"I don't know," pronounced Christophe seriously, "but it

seems to me that being in a theater's no sort of a profession. Keeping waxworks, now, that's different—but play acting . . .”

“There, you don't understand it no more than I do!” Adolphe shouted him down.

“All right then,” answered Christophe hotly, “I don't understand.”

“You mind your own business and don't put your oar in.”

“Not put my oar in? Me? When I've spent the whole day looking for a job for Gaspard!”

The other two looked at him in surprise.

“Yes,” he exulted. “I was looking for a job and I've found one. My cousin Bistram in the Rue Olympique will take him.”

“Has he a theater?” asked Gaspard dubiously.

“Fff! A theater? He's got a workshop. He's a locksmith!”

“And has he got to turn locksmith?” Adolphe burst out.

“Man, he's an actor. He wants to act.”

“If he takes my advice, he'll turn locksmith!”

Gaspard did not laugh. Although he had not expected such a suggestion, he was touched with the kindly spirit.

“Mon cher Christophe,” he said, “it's jolly decent of you. Now this is what we'll do. I'll have one more shot at it. Or, to be quite frank, several more shots. And if I really can't stick it, you shall take me to your cousin in the Rue Olympique. A man can benefit humanity by making locks, to keep thieves from breaking in.”

“Gaspard,” protested Adolphe, “that's one at us.”

“No,” said Gaspard, surprised, “you don't still thieve, do you?”

“Well, no,” said Adolphe doubtfully, “but looking back—”

“We're not going to look back!” cried Gaspard. “We're looking forward!”

There was a knock at the door.

“That'll be Justine.”

“Tell her I'm dumb,” whispered Gaspard.

They were slowly growing accustomed to his ideas.

Justine came in. Adolphe bent down and whispered the sad news.

“Gaspard's gone dumb from yesterday. It's a shock.”

Justine started and put her hand over her mouth to stifle a cry of astonishment. Then she went timidly up to Gaspard. He got up and went to her with a smile.

“Good evening,” she answered.

He looked at her reproachfully and shook his head.

"I couldn't come before. I had—a job."

He waved his hand as if to drive away unpleasant thoughts.

"I must earn my living somehow, mustn't I!" she answered, hurt.

He patted her shoulder, smiling kindly into her eyes.

"There, I know you don't think badly of me . . . but I thought . . . Mon Dieu, how did it happen?"

He put on the air of an injured innocent.

"Poor fellow!"

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders, then shook his head.

"Not doing anything about it? That's easy to say."

Gaspard pointed to her and the other two with a friendly smile.

"Of course we'll help you as chance has sent you our way!" Suddenly she jumped up. "Why, he's not dumb at all! We can talk together quite all right!"

"You understood me, didn't you, Justine?"

"Of course I did!" cried Justine and then realized suddenly that Gaspard had really spoken. "Then he's not dumb!"

"Of course not!" shouted Gaspard, hugging Justine in his joy. "Thank you, Justine, for showing me I'm not."

She tried to push him away.

"I'm so happy," he explained. "I'm not dumb even when I don't speak."

"You seemed to me to be talking," Justine assured him. "If Adolphe hadn't told me I shouldn't have realized that you weren't. But now let me go. It isn't seemly for a nice young man to be holding a woman like me in his arms."

"It's all for love," grinned the pickpocket Adolphe.

"Me and love?" Justine spat. "That's like putting doves and apes in one cage."

"I once loved a girl—like you," said Debureau. As he spoke he realized how he must have changed. Not long ago he would have been ashamed to speak of it. But with these folk everything seemed so natural. And what was natural seemed best.

"She'll have been much younger."

"Forgive me, she was. She was called Margot."

"Did you love her for long?"

"Once."

"Then your acquaintance didn't last long?"

"One evening, as I say. But I remember things like that a long time. For me it was—like a lasting love."

"He's a good boy," she said huskily. "That's why Christophe jumped in after him."

"You know I forbade you to speak—" began Christophe angrily.

"He deserves to have some nice girl who'd appreciate him."

"Not me," Gaspard contradicted her.

"Why not?"

"I don't think of it now. There's something I must prove."

"All right," said Justine with the air of an expert. "But these things mustn't be left out. It all belongs together."

"Justine will be wanting a monument for her services," Adolphe teased her.

"If you were educated," she told him, "you'd know that a list is drawn up, and to make it they were hunting us from pillar to post almost all of last year. In the quartier Saint-Honoré there is one fille to every fifty inhabitants. And that's the healthiest part of town!"

"So you say."

"And the worst is Les Halles, and why? Because you get about seven hundred other people living there to each one of us. That's the reason."

"How d'you come to know all this?"

"It's very important, mon petit. Professional secret. It wouldn't have occurred to me. But it must be important if gentlemen in offices write it all down and do nothing all the year but count it up. Perhaps they're interested in us."

"Perhaps. And so's Gaspard. He's nearly asleep."

"No." Debureau turned his head. "I've just remembered how I hit a fellow who insulted Margot and he called me a prostitute's bully."

"Oh, did he?" laughed Christophe. "Then you're really related to Justine."

"This Margot of yours, she may have been a lady born, the kind the officers keep."

"I don't know. I don't know anything about her."

One o'clock sounded from Notre Dame. Gaspard got ready to go.

"Will you come again?"

"I'll come some time. Perhaps not tomorrow—I don't know when—but I shall think of you, all three."

"If you need anything, you can always come to us."

"I certainly will."

"And if you find this theater business is no go," Christophe reminded him, "don't forget: Rue Olympique. The locksmith Bistram."

"I'd come to you first . . ."

"Yes, but suppose I've had a scrap with Adolphe and he's given me a lick with an iron bar in the ruelle . . ."

"Don't you dare, boys, or I'll drown myself again and refuse to be rescued."

"I'll give him a good cuffing," Adolphe swore solemnly, "and put these ideas out of his head."

Gaspard went out into the night. From the Seine came a kindly splashing. The warm night sighed about him. He was happy. He had never been so full of hope and yearning.

He met a girl with a pretty figure and a pale face.

"Is your name Margot?"

"No, I'm called Yvette."

"That's a pity."

"Why? Don't you like it? Can't you love me if I'm not called Margot?"

"Oh, yes, I could love you very much. Pity I've no money."

"How much have you got?"

"About five francs."

"Let's have a look at you," said Yvette, and turned him to the light. "Nice eyes. If you like I'll give you a kiss for that fortune of yours. Veux-tu?"

"Where?" he asked, taking her hand.

"Come along," she said, leading him.

He followed her happily.

"You can call me Margot, if you like."



## II

### THE BIRTH OF PIERROT

DEBUREAU felt richer and more experienced when he woke next day in his mansard and looked through the narrow slit in the roof at the blue sky. Blessed yesterday! Blessed Margot—I beg your pardon, Yvette. It is true we shall have no breakfast or dinner today, but we shall last out somehow till evening on that piece of dry crust that's left—and your tenderness was worth it all, to the very last sou. Oh, you were worth thousands!

To pay for love— No, with the best will in the world he could see nothing bad in that. Of course he would have liked to find a girl who would say: Dear Gaspard, I know you're nothing and probably never will be, and I know you've got nothing and never will have, but for me there's only you in the world, and here I am, I give myself to you. That would have been simply heaven on earth! But that was a wild dream, like wanting to take Frédéric Lemaître's place and act with the divine Mademoiselle Mars, or be made one of King Charles's ministers. It was altogether impossible. And Gaspard did not look high. He would have been happy with some pretty little modiste. Oh, a modiste was too high; let's say a seamstress or an ouvreuse at the theater or even a girl in a shop. But a poor girl like that would have to be sure that her fiancé had at least enough to keep them both. And Gaspard so far had never had anything. Wealth had seemingly disinherited him forever. What could he offer? His vagrant life? He was bound rather to advise a girl to go her own way and not think of him.

And if some rich and exalted lady had come and said— Here, lad, I've fallen in love with you and I'll carry you off to live in luxury with me!—he would still have said no. Of course it was madness to think of such things at all, but Gaspard was sure that he would refuse. Perhaps it was because he had always lived at a distance from the upper classes and hated them. Ladies in perukes, with furs and jewels, had no charms for him. He could not have held one of them in his arms. Their eyes were cold, their faces lifeless, their hands of marble—they were not women for

whom it was possible to feel love. And he needed to feel something, even if he had to take a girl like Yvette by the hand and let her lead him aside for a moment's happiness. He could feel it there. Perhaps he loved them all. He had found that only the poor girls had the warm gleam in their eyes which promised tenderness and devotion; only the shopgirls, the washer girls of St. Geneviève and the apprentices at the hat shops had life in their faces. Blooming as roses, they had warm, living lips, quivering with tenderness, which he longed to kiss. Your high-born beauty was as cold as a statue, like the entrance to a royal palace—depressing and showing no joy in life. She was strange. Only the poor girls were beautiful.

He felt specially drawn to those who were most outcast. It is true that in Paris the distinction was not so sharp. The Parisian street girl did not feel herself an outcast, knowing that her luckier sisters in the past had even reached the throne. For Gaspard they were the only women whom he was capable of loving. They were able to throw him into rapture. Their freedom, camaraderie and gaiety captivated him. He respected them for their courage. Their experience made them more attractive than honest women. They had understanding and were willing to take risks. And they were interesting. Gaspard was always glad to meet a new one, it was like entering a new world. They were not bloodless young ladies from behind shuttered windows, they were creatures of his own world, creatures with blood in their veins, battle in their eyes, and courage to face the future.

And that was why he loved them.

Debureau could not wait till the evening. He went straight to Félix's dressing room.

"There's something I want to ask—"

"I can't let you act, Gaspard, forgive me but I can't."

"It's not that. I want to change the drunkard's part."

"What's that? And what do you want to act instead? A handsome prince with a guitar?"

Gaspard brought out the Watteau Victor Hugo had given him, and showed it to Félix.

"I can't see anything. It's all smudged."

"Pierrot."

"What do we want with Pierrot when we've got Harlequin? And anyway, it's got to be a comic figure."

"I'd try that."

"Go to the manager, then. I don't want to have anything to do with it."

"He'll do what you say."

Félix shook his head.

"Off with you and do as you please. Fortunately your turn's not a long one."

Gaspard went. Resolutely he began to build up his new part.

"What d'you think you're doing?" the others asked him.

"I've a new part."

He knew that it would not be easy. He was prepared in advance for all the jeers and insults of the street. If he could not carry it off, he would turn locksmith.

Suddenly he stood before the others a changed man. He had tucked his shirt into his ash gray trousers and put on a hat from which he had removed the brim. The Théâtre des Funambules was one of the richest in costumes and properties. The pale, powdered face looked out from the broad collar.

They stared at him, first casually at his reflection in the glass, then straight at him, taking in the details.

"Not too bad," they said; it was the greatest concession imaginable.

"It's Gilles," decided one of them. "But it's not quite right, somehow."

"I've had to use the old properties," Gaspard excused himself. "If I had new ones . . ."

"And what are you doing as Gilles?"

"I'm going to play his part."

"But your part's a comic one, and you look as mournful as the real Gilles."

"It'll come, it'll come," Gaspard repeated resolutely.

"You look as if you were going to a funeral, man!"

"Why not?" He turned, but he stumbled as he did so and staggered. Not a muscle in his face moved, and just because of that the effect was very funny. They all burst out laughing.

"There, you see!" said Gaspard, smiling triumphantly.

The laughter turned sour on their lips.

"He's a fool who likes to show off," they said when he had gone.

Gaspard could not wait until the performance. He wanted assurance. Assurance at any price. He was ready to win it, even if it meant dancing down the boulevards as Gilles. He would have

gone to the circus or entered a waxwork show, simply to appear before the public as Gilles and read their verdict in their eyes.

The play was really made up of improvisations by actors who thoroughly knew their parts and their scale of gestures and expressions. Thus the small change could not upset anyone. The actors could have acted with anyone who had stepped out of the audience or fallen from the skies.

But for all that, Félix-Harlequin turned anxiously when the drunken old man in a shirt did not appear at the right moment. Instead of him the white figure of Gilles hobbled on to the stage. But he and Columbine acted their usual start of surprise. Gilles chased them off the stage as the drunkard had done, but his expression hardly changed. Halfway across the stage he tripped and fell. The audience laughed, their laughter increased as Gilles got up. Even now his expression had not changed. He stood up with a thoughtful expression; he scratched his forehead, his chin. He really didn't know why he came there! What did he want? He seemed to be going out; now he was nearly gone. He repeated his entrance so as to find out what he wanted; perhaps he would remember. The audience had guessed his plan, it was amusing. Would he fall down again? Of course he would. Gilles quickened his pace and fell, then raised his head and waited to see if it would dawn on him. No. Try again, then. The audience laughed more and more uproariously. Words cannot describe it; one must experience on one's own diaphragm the effect of the actor on his audience.

After the performance Gaspard went to the dressing room. He was panting and trembling with impatience to hear what they would say. But something within him was exulting and shouting: Yes! Yes! He wanted to hug someone, to climb, to jump, to fight someone.

He waited.

He still had on his make-up when Harlequin finished his turn and came into the dressing room.

He hasn't called me, I'll go myself, thought Gaspard. It's either very good or very bad. He stood up and looked Félix straight in the face. Harlequin had taken off his peruke and was looking rather silly with his make-up ending halfway up his forehead. He too was still panting. The manager Bertrand came in behind him.

"Well?"

Félix was silent, prolonging the dreadful uncertainty of the moment.

"Fine him for upsetting things at a performance!" said Félix severely. Gaspard's heart sank. "And then," went on Félix, "order another play from the author with a big part for Pierrot. Debureau shall act it!"

Tears came into Gaspard's eyes. Stop it, you fool! His hands wandered about his breast and dragged at his shirt. He clasped his hands. Was he speaking or just miming? What was there to say?

"Oh, Monsieur Félix!" he managed to murmur at last with lips made numb by happiness. At this point the cheap shirt could not hold out any longer and tore in his hands.

"Fine him for destroying the property of the theater," said Félix, adding with a smile: "I'll pay it all for him!" And he went out.

Nothing else happened, no one said anything; but it was clear to everyone what had happened. A new artist had been born among them. His colleagues realized it with mixed feelings, sitting before their strips of looking glass. There was a buzz which might have been either congratulation or insult.

It's all so simple, thought Gaspard. He was in a hurry though he did not know where he was going. No one shall spoil it for me. I'll watch over this happiness of mine.

When he was ready the youngest of the players, who acted the little boy's part, said:

"Someone's cock-a-hoop, what?"

Gaspard was not angry. He turned from the door and answered, smiling good naturedly:

"Don't forget, mon petit, I'm thirty years old." There was bitterness in the words, and no one said anything else nasty even after Gaspard had gone. He knew that the others would not have allowed it.

A new play was being rehearsed at Funambules. "Harlequin and the Golden Eggs: or Mother Goose." It was not very different from the plays that had gone before, but for Gaspard it was the first great and good play that the Funambules had played. Like the others it was a harlequinade, a dumb-show, "a magnificent show in the English style with changes of scene and costume." But he was acting Pierrot in it. He was bringing Pierrot on to the stage for the first time.

"You're not the first." Félix shook his head. "Don't think you are. Plenty of actors have copied the Italians before now."

"That doesn't matter," said Gaspard modestly, but he was certain that his Pierrot would be the first.

There was something else new. Monsieur Lambert, who had put together the new play, added a few little songs and a prologue, with the kind permission of the Inspector of Theaters—and this was great news.

Bertrand had the playbill printed, with the list of characters, and Gaspard had the honor of reading his name there for the first time. He came sixth, just after Félix, Placide, Charles, Laurent, and Vidain; and immediately after him came Désirée, Marianne and Toinette. At the end were the players who acted watchmen, soldiers, devils and peasants and who were only indicated by numbers. Up to now he had been a number like these men, but now he had been born as a name.

Debureau would have sworn that this play marked the highest peak of dramatic literature of all ages. He was convinced that Monsieur Lambert could wipe the floor with Racine and Shakespeare. He took so much interest in the rehearsals that soon everyone found him a nuisance.

"Harlequin and Columbine hide in the straw," Félix would explain. "Pierrot sees them while the villagers are dancing and in his delight turns a somersault, or perhaps two—"

"No," objected Gaspard, "first I must go and tell my master, Cassandra."

"Why?"

"Because that's what anyone would do."

"What's that got to do with it?" grumbled Félix.

"Because we've got people watching it—we must behave like people."

Bertrand winked at Félix; was he to throw Gaspard out? But Félix remembered that he had actually forgotten that he was on the stage while Gaspard was playing, and waved his hand.

"Let him be. He can do as he likes."

At this point the author intervened, Monsieur Lambert, a pleasant young man who seemed ashamed that his name was to appear on the playbill of this little theater of the boulevards.

"But the play doesn't give a picture of real life. It's more like a dream—a series of adventures which aren't real. . . ."

"I know," agreed Gaspard with a friendly smile. "But the

dream must deal with real people. Let our audience dream, but they mustn't be awakened by something which jars."

"Don't keep on about it, Gaspard," cried Félix impatiently, "let's get on."

But Gaspard could not stop making his little reservations. He always apologized beforehand with a look and then defended his ideas.

"Pierrot is Pierrot and must dance."

"Pardon, Monsieur Félix, but if Pierrot is to be wicked in Monsieur Lambert's play (and he is, isn't he?) then he can't dance."

"But he's a clown."

"I know, but he has to pursue Harlequin, lay traps for him. Mille pardons, Messieurs, but if he's a malicious person he simply cannot jump about like a child."

Monsieur Lambert was an educated man and he took Gaspard's side.

"Monsieur Debureau is right to a certain extent. The dance is the sign of a gay, simple nature. Perhaps we had better leave him this freedom."

"This is the first time I've seen a Pierrot as a philosopher. I've always seen him as a fool. Diable! does Monsieur Debureau think he's going to make a revolution here?"

"Why not, Monsieur Félix?" answered Gaspard in a voice as cold as marble, turning paler than when he was fished out of the river.

Félix was not amused by his insistence.

"Sacré mille tonnerres! get on with the play, or I'll pack up my traps and walk out on you!"

"Shall I throw him out?" suggested Bertrand obligingly. He could not understand what it was all about.

"No!" Félix roared at him.

"I only thought . . ."

"But the fellow's right!" shouted Félix. "Can't you see what a clever chap he is? My head's in a whirl. Fine him for not coming here sooner with his ideas."

"Oh, well, if you're on his side, I'm sorry I spoke," grumbled Bertrand.

Gaspard did not know if Félix was serious, but he ventured:

"Monsieur Félix, I imagine Pierrot very much like the people who come to our show. Just as good and just as bad. These people haven't any overwhelming passions and feelings, most of

them just do what happens to occur to them. They don't take great decisions, they just do what they think they have to do."

"But you don't act like that," objected Félix. "You show stoicism, moral elevation . . ."

"I'll see to that, I'll make it quite all right," Gaspard assured him.

They went on rehearsing a little while.

"Debureau! What are you doing?"

Gaspard started. What had happened? He was trying with all his might.

"You're making fun of the whole thing!"

"No."

"That ironical smile of yours is intolerable!"

"It shall go, Monsieur Félix, it shall go."

In the interval Félix was streaming with perspiration.

"It's a bit too thick, Gaspard, you're taking too much on yourself. I've been a fool. I ought to have left you where you were. You were much less dangerous as Number Nine."

"I'll do my very best, I swear it."

"Don't you understand it's my responsibility? Suppose people aren't amused at your mechanical, inanimate Pierrot? They've been accustomed to see him jumping about!"

"But why, Monsieur Félix, why rush hither and thither like a madman?"

"Gaspard," Félix bowed to the inevitable, "let the audience decide. You're an insufferable fellow and I shall be very pleased if they hiss you off the stage. It will at least assure me that I am not mistaken."

"If you'd rather, Monsieur Félix . . ."

"But something keeps on telling me that you may be right. I haven't the courage to forbid you. Act, act for all you're worth. And when you're hissed off the stage, don't blame me."

"You're not very encouraging, Monsieur Félix."

"I'm not, because you've got me scared. I've no courage myself."

Never had the rehearsals at the Funambules taken place amid such excitement or in such an electric atmosphere. It is true that the author had never been so exacting about the music; it is true that there had never been so many changes of scene or so many diverse effects as Félix introduced. But the main reason was that never before had they been rehearsing one of the chief parts of Debureau.



"Did you see the airs the young puppy puts on?" asked the prima donna, when Gaspard stopped rehearsing because there was too much noise.

But Gaspard was not proud. He trembled inwardly as to the success of the play. He could not be as indifferent to it as they were. For him it was a veritable inner experience, perfected by constant thought about the best expression. And his concentrated attention upset the others. They all admitted in their different ways that the Théâtre des Funambules would win its decisive battle. The rope-dancing past of the Funambulists was forgotten, they were going to act a play. Sometimes it happened that they all held their breath as they watched Gaspard; that was when he was acting alone. Was it possible that he had been among them and they had never noticed!

Sometimes he surprised them all by a gesture or expression which that stage had never seen before. Even the cleaners in the auditorium would stop their dusting and look at him open-mouthed.

"What a way to hold a knife. You'd never kill anyone with that." This was in the scene where Pierrot has to cut off Harlequin's head.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur Félix, just you try!" And Félix had to admit that Gaspard was right again.

"How did you learn that, you murderer?"

Gaspard shrugged his shoulders and smiled in embarrassment. He could not confess that he had had a private performance from the red-headed Christophe who had some experience of banditry.

"It's too damn realistic. I'm scared of you killing me outright."

"You, Monsieur Félix?" asked Gaspard lovingly. "The idea!"

Thus the stormy week of rehearsals passed amid thunder and lightning. New costumes were made, new scenery painted. The manager even had a shave; the new play was a sacrifice for him, too.

"They aren't worth it, ce public à quatre sous."

"They are," Gaspard insisted.

"Voyons, Debureau, won't you tell us the name of your teacher?" Marianne, the prima donna, asked, coming up to him.

"Shall I really tell you?" Gaspard almost blushed.

"Yes, quickly. Who taught you?"

"Le public à quatre sous."

"Here in the theater?"

"No, outside."

Marianne shrugged her shoulders.

"No one else?"

"No."

### III

#### PIERROT'S PREMIERE

"LADIES and gentlemen! Citizens of Paris, stop! Here is a theater, unique of its kind, le Théâtre des Funambules. But there are no rope dancers here now. Have you heard of us? Come in and see for yourselves! Walk up, walk up, noble sirs! Here's what you've been looking for! For a moderate price you can see first-class artists! Here and nowhere else! Music, strike up! Do you hear? We have a distinguished audience—and you, noble gentlemen and highborn ladies, will feel at home among them! Look at the prices of our seats! For the most nobly born we have the avant-scène, a magnificent place! It costs a mere trifle, gentlemen, only one franc! We have thought of you too, gentle ladies, our loges are designed specially for you. The public can hardly see into them, you will be in delightful privacy! The price is only five sous more. Then there are the fauteuils d'orchestre! A trifle—only ten sous! You will see it all magnificently, just en face! And the amphithéâtre—four sous—and the paradis—only three sous! It's a gift! Walk up, gentlemen! Are you going to one of our neighbors? Perhaps to see Madame Saqui? What, do you want to see acrobats who can't turn a somersault? Or dancers as heavy as bears? Or soubrettes who have just been celebrating their fiftieth birthday? Gentlemen, where are you going? Here's the show for you, here! here! Here you have the glorious, incomparable Félix as Harlequin; Monsieur René plays the part of the old man, Cassandra; Monsieur Laurent his assistant; Mademoiselle Marianne interprets Columbine for you; Mademoiselle Désirée, Mother Goose—oh, you will split your sides with laughing. Don't go elsewhere, gentlemen, come inside! Elsewhere you will only find fleas, here you will find art! I must not forget, Monsieur Debureau is acting Gilles. Walk up, walk up, gentlemen, be advised, walk up!"

Elegantly dressed gentlemen smiled ironically at the courage of the crier in daring to address his invitation to them as they passed by to the restaurant or to some famous theater. They did not imagine that in two years' time they would be tumbling over

each other to get any kind of ticket for this underground cave.

But the noble sirs in greasy cloth coats and with red caps on their heads did not keep him waiting. They hurried down. A new show. Everyone was pleased. The master man took his wife and paid for the *avant-scène*, willing that his neighbors should see and envy him. A few pairs of lovers found in the loges a cozy snug-gery for little money, with entertainment thrown in. But the most passionate theater lovers sat at the back in the parterre and the little gallery called the *amphithéâtre* because of its curving shape. Here they came, nearly knocking over the crier as they hurried for a ticket (one row nearer!), and were already clapping their hands with impatience half an hour before the play began, and rapturously greeting each new light who hurried into the room. This was the important part of the audience. If the play were bad they would be hissing even before the interval; if it were good, it would be safe for a month. They were incorruptible and did not let themselves be influenced by anyone. They were perfectly natural and had their own undistorted opinions of the theater. They watched with the whole of their being in their gaze. They demanded the same of the actors, and rightly so. And they were grateful. If an actor gave them what they wanted they would love him to the death and rank him in their thoughts along with *le bon Dieu*, the fallen Emperor, *Béranger*, and their mistress.

The atmosphere behind the scenes is so charged, that the least friction would produce an explosion. It is only a third-rate little theater, catering for the artisans and laborers of the neighborhood. But the actors, poor souls, think that today's performance will beat all records. All art is looking towards them.

"Catcalls only depress a fool, and applause only turns the heads of the conceited," Dugazon is reputed to have said once to Talma. Talma was dead, but Dugazon's words lived on and Debureau made them his guide. The first night brought much temptation to vanity. The people were grateful and delighted, for the play was an instant success.

"The Golden Eggs" was certainly the most expensive play that the *Théâtre des Funambules* had ever put on since its beginning. But the first performance went off all right, it was acted a second and a third time, and then it went on and on, always with the same success. Only Debureau became the real star and part author of the play. Even that became a commonplace. Gaspard was not to be bewildered by applause; but he began to believe in

himself and to have confidence, though he realized that most of his success was due to thought, courage, and design. So he continued to ponder and to work within himself.

Gaspard acting Pierrot was not an instinctive actor. He knew what he wanted and how to act it. We must not make him out to be a magnificent natural talent. No. He had an idea and he carried it out, which is even more deserving of praise. But we must admit one thing: Debureau acted as he pleased; he could not have acted otherwise. He would have failed if he had merely wanted to act the clown as his predecessor had done. Life had modeled him, chiseled him and adopted him exclusively to the actor's calling. He could not make up seriously because he realized its futility. He could not be other than he really was: pale, rather serious than smiling, with thin, compressed lips and uninteresting face, with a quietly ironical smile at everything he came across, with a face which he could make look incredibly stupid.

It was only at first that the play's success seemed particularly important, when Gaspard imagined that with that first performance he had suddenly become known and was one of the leading personalities of Paris. He left the theater with a face wreathed in smiles prepared to answer joyfully anyone who recognized him, and went along the boulevard smiling vacantly. But no one called after him: That's him! No one's eyes lit up when they met him. People were just as inobservant as before. This expectation did not, of course, last more than a few days. Gaspard soon reconciled himself to the fact that the actor in an Italian comedy cannot expect to arouse attention in the street. His white mask on the stage is too different from the sallow face which goes with his ordinary clothes.

But he had joyful experiences for all that. For instance when the gray-haired old woman who sold tickets clasped her hands as he was leaving the theater and said adoringly:

"Monsieur Debureau! Monsieur Debureau!" In her voice were all the ardor and admiration of which her old theatrical heart was capable. A younger woman, who opened the doors of the boxes, only gazed adoringly, not venturing to speak a word.

Another time he was delighted to hear from the back a concerted "De-bu-reau, De-bu-reau" and he realized that it was his queer friends Adolphe and Christophe, and besides them Justine with a whole bevy of her companions. He was sure that she was saying to them: "There, girls: there's your champion!"; and the

girls shouted and paid their debt. Félix scolded Gaspard for having invited a claque there, but Gaspard was really innocent.

There was another delightful surprise. After the success of "The Golden Eggs" he had higher wages; but he did not care about money. He put the whole of his first week's earnings into the collection that the students were taking on behalf of the recently condemned Béranger who had been fined ten thousand francs and condemned to nine months' imprisonment. He felt bound to in gratitude for the songs which had so often delighted him.

Next week he bought a dog with his extra wages. He had been thinking of it for a long time, ever since he was left alone. He kept on thinking how lovely it would be to be able to chat with a live creature in the morning and at night, a creature before whom he need not be shy because it was not a man. And when he happened to see, in an animal shop on the Boulevard Ferry, a little bitch which had been one of a troupe of performing dogs, he made up his mind. He begged the shopkeeper not to sell it to anyone else for the moment, and hurried back for it as soon as he had earned enough to pay for it. Coquette was her stage name, and for many days she was a great joy to him and remained so even after the end of this honeymoon of true companions. The happy Gaspard had at last something which really belonged to him. Not something, but actually *somebody*, a creature, a living being, a being who understood him. And she could act, too. She was not an ordinary dog who went splashing through puddles and lifting its leg against walls. Coquette had played principal leading parts, she had a splendid past. She had worn lace and silk, she was used to admirers in the wings, tit-bits from the stage box, and the applause of the parterre. It is hard to say how she had parted with all this glory; but seeing that her master and impresario had been forced to sell his troupe, she had had to give up her liveried servants, run about on four feet like an ordinary dog, and forget. For some years the philosophy of life taught her humility and self-denial. But she was not yet too old to become attached to a master whose love she had frequent occasion to notice, who shared everything with her, and never humiliated her. In the evenings he took her to the theater, and perhaps the half-forgotten surroundings reminded her of the glorious moments of applause, and further endeared her new master to her. Certainly she understood him, she, an actress herself.

## IV

### GASPARD IS A ROMANTIC MODEL

ONE evening after the performance a card was brought to Gaspard's dressing room with this peculiar legend:

CADAMOUR  
roi des modèles

Before he could call to mind where he had heard the name, Cadamour, roi des modèles, was there. He was an extraordinarily handsome and well-developed man, tall and strong, in a rather bizarre costume with a red sash round his waist and a purple shirt covered only by a bright, colored jacket. His temples were slightly gray. He must have been over forty.

"I am Cadamour," said this personage proudly.

"Oh," said Debureau uncertainly, wondering what it was all about.

This was clearly not enough for the king of models for he opened his eyes in astonishment and his whole person expressed surprise.

"Don't you know me?"

"Yes," said Debureau, trying to think.

Cadamour waved a finger before his eyes.

"Leonidas! Leonidas of Thermopylae! Haven't you got it now?"

And when Gaspard still did not fall down and worship him:

"Romulus! Romulus from the Rape of the Sabines! Haven't you got it yet?"

All that Gaspard recognized was that Cadamour spoke with a strong Italian accent.

"I am the glorious model of citizen David, the painter."

It was only then that it began to dawn on Gaspard. He remembered hearing Clément Sanson speak of a remarkable man who had first sat as a model to the painter Naucleurc and, when the latter ended his days under the guillotine, to David for his gigantic canvases. And he was known for his refusal to sit to any other painter and his assertion that his body belonged to citizen

David until Cadamour should die and leave his skeleton to the school of plastic art. Clément had quoted him as an example of how a man could fall in love with the most extraordinary profession and be proud of it. Apparently the glorious Cadamour had not grown out of this peculiarity.

"I remember," said Gaspard at last; "you must forgive me, I don't often look at pictures."

Cadamour shook his gray head sadly and glanced round the walls of the dressing room as much as to say: Art! In a hole like this! Then he said:

"I have a message for you. Please hurry." Gaspard was rather shy before the man. And then Cadamour continued quietly: "Just finish your dressing. I've seen plenty of bodies in my time, and not men's bodies either! The tales I could tell you!" And when Gaspard had got out of his white shirt and trousers and was putting on his clothes he went on: "You try how you like impersonating Despotism at the national festival—with a series of women's legs on your chest the whole time!"

"A bit hard, what?"

"Not hard, intolerable, citizen. The legs were inside transparent dresses and I was looking up at them, see?"

It was difficult not to understand.

"Ready now? Not yet? How would you like posing as Acis with a naked Galatea in your arms? I did that for Girodet—Do you know citizen Girodet, the painter? Probably not. He's dead now. But that time I took to my heels."

Gaspard was afraid to ask questions.

"A countess was amusing herself by being Galatea—I won't tell you her name. She stripped as if she had never done anything else all her life, and lay in my arms as if I were a sofa. But I was naked and so was she, and before citizen Girodet had done more than a couple of strokes I had to give it up. The picture—well, the picture would have been a living one. Do you understand, citizen?"

Citizen Debureau, whose knowledge of sculpture was considerable, understood to his shame.

At the door leading from the dressing room—it was a new dressing room, only a small one, but just for himself, a damp, cold little cubby hole—Félix appeared.

"Why, it's citizen Cadamour!" he cried.

"Myself," answered the giant majestically, "and you are citizen Félix."



"Of course. And what are you doing here with our Pierrot?"

And Debureau at last heard why the king of models had condescended to honor him with a visit.

"I am posing to citizen Bouquet now, and he has entrusted me with the task of finding him a model for a clown. I have been to three cabarets already. And now here I have found your Monsieur—Monsieur Debureau who does not know much about pictures it is true, but looks very interesting."

"I congratulate you, Gaspard. You'll have to have that printed on your visiting cards. What an honor!" smiled Félix and made an exaggerated bow to Cadamour.

"A cultivated man," pronounced Cadamour, when Félix had gone out.

"Yes," agreed Gaspard, "but I don't want to pose as a model to any painter."

"Why not? Do you know any greater honor than to be perpetuated for the future?"

"But models are for that, not actors," objected Gaspard.

"Monsieur Bouquet asked me to find him a real clown."

"There are scores of clowns at the fairs and in the boulevards behind, they'd all be glad . . ."

Cadamour looked at him sadly and said, a degree more respectfully:

"Then I must tell you, citizen Debureau, that citizen Bouquet himself chose you out. It was not I."

"The painter Bouquet was here at our theater?"

"He was. Yesterday."

"Where did he sit?"

"In the loges. He had an appointment with a certain young lady with whom he was not anxious to be seen—so he crept with her into a loge at your theater."

"Oh, is that all," said Gaspard, disappointed.

"But it seems," added Cadamour, anxious to pacify him, "that he had plenty of spare time to look at the stage, because he came and said to me: 'Cadamour, bring me the Pierrot from the Funambules, or I'll never see you again!'"

"Did he really say that?" asked Gaspard, wonderingly.

"Well," Cadamour hesitated, "perhaps not quite so sternly—but it's possible he might have carried out his threat. But don't think ill of me, Monsieur. While I was young, they fought over me. Nowadays I can't stand for so long—but citizen Bouquet has

created a Prometheus from me which will be envied for centuries. Now I am not what I used to be—”

And the king of models began to ruminate on his spectacular rise and sat all huddled together in his chair so that Gaspard was quite sorry for him.

The lamplighter came to tell them that the theater was being closed, so they went out, Gaspard with Coquette, who was upset because her master was not paying her as much attention as usual.

“What kind of a painter is this Monsieur Bouquet?” Gaspard ventured to ask Cadamour.

“I must confess,” was the answer, “that he has not reached the heights of fame to which I am accustomed. But I have not been working with him long. Ah, citizen Debureau, have you noticed the third statue from the end of the right hand side of the avenue in the Tuileries?”

Gaspard had to admit that he had not even noticed that there were statues there at all.

“The line! The muscles in the calf! The whole pose! A true Achilles!”

“Achilles?”

“Yes. It is I, it is done from me. By Gros. Ah, it is a glorious sensation to know that one’s bodily remains will be preserved for ever as art.”

“So you think I should go to your Monsieur Bouquet?”

Cadamour lowered his voice and said in more propitiatory tones:

“Please do, citizen. Do it for my sake, so that I don’t have my wages cut down to a pittance, and for citizen Bouquet’s who is burning with the desire to paint your portrait.”

“Do you think he liked my performance?”

“He said you had a singular expression.”

“A singular expression,” said Debureau reflectively.

“Why, yes,” said Cadamour with a return of his self-satisfied smile. “Everyone can’t have a body predestined for Hercules and Romulus. You must be contented with an expression. But citizen Bouquet will be delighted even with that.”

Gaspard decided to give this delight to his fellow creature. He was thinking now that he might accept the offer. So far his principle had been not to refuse anything. Everything that came his way had seemed worthwhile. This unconscious quality had laid the foundation of his rich and many-sided knowledge of people

and their characteristics. It was one of the fundamental attributes of the Pierrot of the Funambules.

"Then you'll come, citizen?"

"I think so. Where is it?"

"The address is on the back of my card. Tomorrow afternoon?"

"Yes."

"And you'll bring the costume with you?"

"If they'll lend it me from the theater."

"Splendid. Citizen Debureau, I shall be expecting you. I and citizen Bouquet."

"All right. Good-by."

The gray and muscular giant disappeared into the crowd.

Charles Bouquet was a young man whose father, a respectable master carpenter, had thrown him out because he wanted to become a painter. So Charles set out to seek his fortune and did not say no when a certain nobly born lady decided to keep him for a time. He was not ashamed of his deplorable condition and told Gaspard all about it in quick, crazy sentences before the latter knew what was happening. Cadamour stood behind him smiling in a protecting and half-apologetic way. Bouquet had really been at the Funambules for the reason given; he really wanted to paint Gaspard—a full length portrait of him begging not to be condemned to death.

Gaspard found the whole milieu new and unusually interesting. He looked at the papers stacked against the walls of this little studio on the fifth floor of a house in the Rue Richelieu, he looked at all the details which were so interesting and impressive. Monsieur Bouquet was decidedly playing at the *vie de bohème* and knew what was in keeping. The bottle of cheap wine standing about and the colored ribbons across the ceiling spoke of it eloquently, and insisted on it with their intentional emphasis.

Gaspard changed his dress and took up the required pose. Bouquet told Cadamour to go and fetch the supper, and began to work.

"This white is awfully trying, you know," he said confidentially. "If you were in blue it would be a hundred times easier. But this white, white, white—hat, cheeks, eyes, clothes—how many shades of it are there?"

"What shall you do with the picture when it's finished, Monsieur Bouquet?" asked Gaspard.

"I shall exhibit it, man. I shall exhibit it and we shall both become famous. You and I, do you understand?"

Debureau wanted nothing better. Frankly speaking, it was one of the reasons which had induced him to come. His ambition had tempted him. He said to himself: perhaps something will happen—someone may see it. He did not really know how the picture could help him, but it might be a step towards fame to be painted and exhibited. He had never heard that Félix or Laurent had been painted, and they were very famous actors.

"And when the picture is exhibited, what will be written on it?"

"That it was painted by Charles Bouquet."

"I know. But the title of the picture?"

"The title of the picture? What d'you think? 'Debureau'!"

"Really? Not just 'A Clown' or 'Pierrot'?"

"Of course not! Didn't Cadamour tell you how much I liked your performance?"

"He said it rather as an afterthought."

"Of course. He thinks of nothing but himself. He's down on his luck now, poor fellow. I've nothing myself, but I share it with him. The others fight shy of him. He can't even pose now. And he makes such a fool of himself! But I don't mind. I'm not famous at all, and at least I get some notoriety from the way he behaves." He went on painting for a time and then the door opened. "Oh, there he is at last. Come here, mon vieux!"

But it was not Cadamour. It was a man of about thirty, perhaps a little older, elegantly but quietly dressed, and with a refined face.

"Mon cher Gérard!" cried Bouquet, throwing down his brush. "What a joy to see you in my modest den! Like a ray of sunshine here!"

"First tell your model he can have a rest, because if you once give rein to your tongue the poor fellow will grow into the floor."

"Monsieur Debureau, excuse me a moment and do sit down."

"What an unusual subject," said Gérard, looking at the sketch and comparing it with the living model.

"I'm carrying out in practice some of the things you taught me. I got so tired of classical subjects."

"To citizen Cadamour's great disgust," smiled Gérard.

"He hates me for it. But isn't this a characteristically romantic subject? Away with your cold heroes, you taught me. Very

well, here's my medieval knight, ardent and impressionable, without armor but with a heart: Pierrot!"

Gérard gave one more look at the painting. Then he said gravely:

"You're quite right, Bouquet. There may be more heroism in him than in a knight with a sword. And more grandeur too. Who's your model? I don't know him."

"No, he isn't a model, he's an actor: Monsieur Debureau of the Funambules."

Gaspard trembled with joy and pride at the last words of the painter Bouquet, but the next question gave him a shock.

"Funambules? Where's that?"

"In the Boulevard du Temple," answered Bouquet. "There used to be rope dancers there and the name has remained—but they play Italian pantomime there now."

"How did you get there?" Gérard's surprise was so undisguised that Gaspard was suddenly ashamed of what he knew.

"On love's light wings," said Bouquet with a smile.

"So do I, here," said Gérard, "your father's love."

"Again?"

"Your father, who knows that you studied under me in secret, came to see me this morning. He begged me to persuade you to give up your painting and your bohemian life and to go home and take over the workshop."

"And do you really tell me to?"

"I'm only carrying out my promise."

Bouquet was really alarmed.

"If you persuade me to give up painting it means you're sure I shall never do anything at it—and that will be a terrible thing for me, Gérard."

The elegantly dressed Gérard walked round the walls. Some of the pictures he looked at close to, others from a distance, studying them for quite a time. Bouquet followed him with an agonized gaze.

"My dear Gérard, I'm trembling with impatience! Say a word! But don't decide at once. All this is nothing. No, not all these canvases, these portfolios. They're only rough sketches. Perhaps now—this picture will be my first real work. . . . Ah, Gérard, don't torture me!"

"I won't, my dear Bouquet. I advise you to disobey your father. You're not perfect, you've a great many defects. But you have talent and independence, and that means more to come."

"Ah, Gérard," breathed Bouquet, "you've freed me from the torments of hell."

Gaspard was getting to like young Bouquet more and more. Indeed the obstinate young man seemed rather like himself, with his confidence, courage and the hope that he would find in art the reward and fulfillment of some tremendous yearning.

Cadamour came in and looked annoyed when he saw Gérard.

"Citizen Cadamour, romanticism is in the ascendant!"

"You're a false prophet, citizen Gérard!"

"Do you think so?" smiled Gérard, and went on, more to Bouquet than to him. "The next salon will be quite of his opinion. I've seen the first choice. No antiques! Only medieval subjects, and scenes from ordinary everyday life. I never thought the judges would have the courage. Bouquet, you will shine! Have you seen Géricault's 'Raft of the Medusa'? No? Ah, Bouquet. Run and see it! Off with you, go, run, fly! It's life! Madness and life at the same time! Revolution! Our Revolution!"

"Shall I come with you now?"

"No!" Gérard's benevolent, shining eyes alighted afresh on the white Pierrot. "Work! That's the best thing you can do! Even romanticism can't do without work. It needs more drudgery than your classic sublimity, because we have to reach the human and tear out its secret."

"The secret of its muscular frame," declared Cadamour.

"The secret of its heart and soul—with all its joys and fears!" said Gérard. "To work, Bouquet, and come to me if ever you want anything. I'll have a talk with your father. Good-by!"

"Thanks, dear Gérard," said Bouquet, brush in hand.

Cadamour turned away bitterly, but Debureau, who had been listening to the painter's words as if they were gospel, rose and said with feeling:

"Good night, Monsieur Gérard!"

The painter turned his distinguished head to him, gave him a friendly and encouraging smile, and answered:

"Good night—" But he had forgotten the name.

"Please take up the pose again," said Bouquet. "Thanks. But don't look so sad, please. You belong among the romanticists as well."

"Do you think so?" asked Gaspard joyfully.

"Yes, worse luck!" said Cadamour.

## DEBUREAU BIDS FAREWELL TO THE THEATER

"HO—ho—ho, De—bu—reau!" the parterre at the Funambules raised its cry, and Gaspard stood before the curtain, not smiling, it is true, but responding good-naturedly, seeking out individual men or women with his eyes and bowing to them with raised eyebrows. The régisseur, Félix, did not try to give him a success in the play; the malicious Pierrot had the least sympathetic of parts. Thus it was not on account of the play. It was the will of the people, who with their keen sight, chose out Debureau for their favorite actor. He was nearer to them than anyone else. The old woman at the entrance was not able to answer all the questions that were flung at her, especially after the performance.

"Who is he—that clown in white?"

"Why, that's Monsieur Debureau!" she would answer proudly. No one knew him up to now. But the questions multiplied. Then he began to be known. It was seen that certain groups only came because of him; and they would tell their neighbors: "Him? Why, that's Debureau!"

The malicious Pierrot had just as much malice in him as each of them, and yet he was such a good-natured fellow, too. He was neither good nor bad, he left that simplicity to others. He was seemingly much more complicated, but at the same time much more easily understood. He was in fact just like them, and yet he had something more which made him an original figure of the stage: his eminence, his relation to people, things and happenings, his sarcasm which armed him against all the blows of Fate and helped him to turn them to his own advantage against whoever it might be.

In private Gaspard remained just the same. He began to feel firm ground beneath his feet; he felt that today he would not have said so lightly to Monsieur Bertrand, "Don't come tomorrow," but otherwise his life was not changed. There was no reason why it should be. Bertrand did not hurry to make a more regular contract with Gaspard, and the foolish fellow did not dream that he might ask for more than was absolutely necessary

to live on. He had Coquette and he learned to smoke. Beyond that he did not much care what his colleagues were earning and whether they had more than he. He was intoxicated with work. He cared for nothing but that as many people as possible should see him act. Ah, if only his father and mother and the haughty brothers could have seen him, too! Or the Countess Dorothy, if she ventured into such a low place of amusement! And what dazzled him still more was his power on the stage towards the people down below. How he could rule them! Serve—and at the same time dominate them! Catch their attention, hold it. Give it a shock and keep it in suspense, and with his next movement set them laughing or wondering! It seemed to him that he was acting with an echo. He became a virtuoso in this kind of duet. He sensed in a moment if the echo was not answering his thoughts and if the mutual relationship was weakening. He needed the outburst of applause; it inspired him to greater heights and more emphatic expression. Or sometimes to the reverse gesture.

Gaspard was very happy at this time. He knew, of course, that if he asked any one of the people who went to the *Comédie* or the *Lyrique* whether they knew the actor Debureau, they would have stared wide-eyed. But he was content to be known by his own public. He loved them more and they loved him in return. Ho—ho—ho, Debureau! Could there be any sweeter song for the ears of the poor Pierrot who from being the least of slaves had suddenly become a king and who suddenly felt that instead of treading on thorns he was treading on flowers?

And the women who used not even to pay a scrap of attention to him, for whom he simply did not exist—did he not see their eyes watching him from the loges and the parterre, following him with looks of affection and showering the light of their smiles upon him? Madame Désirée often asked him a lot of condescending questions, and Mademoiselle Marianne had called him “mon cher” about three times. His life outside, in boulevard and mansard, was still unchanged. Gaspard’s yearning continued. He began to shun his casual loves of a moment, which left nothing with him but a feeling of disgust.

Perhaps because he was too full of yearning and fixed his gaze on the horizon, he did not see what was being offered him close at hand. The whole boulevard knew that Mademoiselle Caterina Levaux, who sold charcuterie at the little shop opposite the Funambules, was in love with Gaspard Debureau. He was the only person ignorant of it. Her pretty, green painted shop was



full of customers in the intermissions and Mademoiselle Caterina was a witness to the growth of Debureau's fame and knew whom the public favored most. When it was possible she shut her shop during some of the scenes and watched her hero from the doorway. He was so near to her—why, they were neighbors.

It was the old ticket seller who, although she knew that her young colleague was casting languorous glances at Pierrot, suggested to poor Caterina a most ingenious plan. If she could not catch the attention of the master, let her try with the dog! What a sacrifice! The whole shop was placed at Coquette's disposal, without reserve and without reference to price. When Gaspard passed by without looking, Coquette waited for the expected dainty. It must be admitted that Coquette showed the languishing charcutière a great deal more affection and gratitude than did her master. She had been given to understand that she could eat everything in the shop by degrees, and gladly allowed herself to be fattened up by the trembling hands of the lovesick Caterina. She even put up with it when Caterina kissed her in an excess of tenderness. But her hardhearted master did not see even that. It never occurred to him to stop and say thank you. Fond as he was of people, he never thought of stopping and exchanging a few friendly words. So the sacrifice to Coquette remained without result. Gaspard walked on as far as the end of the street and then looked back impatiently and whistled. Coquette snapped up the last morsel and jumped out of the humble embrace. Poor Mademoiselle Caterina Levaux!

Perhaps the neglected Caterina prayed to God to punish the inobservant hero of her dreams, perhaps Providence itself was offended at his behavior. Fortune turned her face away from Debureau. It happened two days running. Félix took it very hard that the old public of the Funambules had transferred its favor; he used an opportunity when he and Bertrand were having a quarrel, and declared that he would leave. If Bertrand had had a little courage he would have let him go and left the whole thing to Pierrot; but he lacked this quality. He was as conservative as the Académie Française and when he had once taken up a line, he followed it until he ran his head against a wall. He considered that Pierrot in "The Golden Eggs" was a chance success and would pass. He was convinced that it was Félix who drew people to the theater, and wanted to keep him at any price.

"Do you want Debureau to go?"

"I don't wish him harm, and I've pointed him out the way to success myself. But it is intolerable that the two of us should continue here. I'm going to Saqui."

"Don't go to Saqui. Debureau shall go."

"You can't throw him out!"

"You wait!"

Next day Bertrand had a capital weapon put into his hand. A fire broke out behind the scenes during the performance. It was nothing tragic; a few costumes and pieces of scenery were burned, but in the Paris theaters, where smoking was permitted, that was a not infrequent occurrence. It was a magnificent pretext for Bertrand.

"I shall have to pay the official fine for disorder in the theater, people won't feel safe and will stop coming, I must buy a fire-fighting outfit, pails and sand—I shall have so many fresh expenses, I must cut down wages."

Nearly all the actors felt it, but Bertrand only talked it over with some of them. The news of the fire spread, it is true, and for the next few days the attendance went down considerably. But the wage cuts were out of all proportion. Gaspard was hit worst of all. He could not believe his eyes. His new contract gave him not quite half of what he had before, less than ten francs a week.

"Monsieur le Régisseur," he said, and his voice trembled, "even my dog couldn't live a week on this. How am I to keep myself?"

Bertrand shrugged his shoulders. "Mon Dieu, Debureau, I don't want to rob you. If anyone will give you more, take it. But I can't. You know—"

"You want me to go, Monsieur Bertrand?" exclaimed Gaspard.

"I'm not compelling you to." Bertrand shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I can't die of hunger. And who on earth shall you get to play Pierrot in my place?"

"I haven't thought about it yet. Perhaps Laurent—or one of the others."

"But I don't want them to!" cried Debureau in a rage. "I don't want to go. I don't want anyone else to act Pierrot, because it's my part. Pierrot is mine!"

"Gaspard, please don't make a scene here. There's the stage for that."

"And you want to drive me off it! But, Monsieur le Régis-

seur, I promise you I won't go off of my own free will! This is my public and I'm not going to let it go! I won't give up Pierrot!"

"Gaspard," Bertrand soothed him treacherously, "why are you so angry?"

"All my expectations!" and Gaspard had tears in his voice by now. "All my hopes! And now you want to take it all from me! Never! I won't let it go! Not even to you, Monsieur Félix!"

Félix was very sorry for him; he looked at him gloomily and felt sympathetic; but he could not and would not help him. Perhaps this was the only way!

"Gaspard," he said, taking him by the button of his blouse, "you don't know the laws of dumb-show, you're talking too much!"

"You're right. I need dumb-show to avenge myself. But I won't be revenged. You can tell Monsieur Bertrand it's all right, and set your vanity at rest. I'll act for the last time on Sunday."

"Where shall you go?" asked Félix, swallowing the insult.

"I shall turn locksmith."

However, Fortune did not turn her face away definitely and forever from Gaspard. If Fortune had only cared he could have had a manager who looked at him and discovered hidden treasure in him. Instead of this the theater was run by the business ideas of Bertrand and the envious Harlequin. In such an atmosphere Debureau could not develop; and yet he would have liked to stay. The little theater had become his real home; he knew the people who attended as he knew himself. He could not get accustomed to another theater. And yet if he could not get on with his own manager for whom he had worked with such devotion and given such a good account of himself, how could he trust a stranger? It would mean beginning again from the bottom. And Gaspard believed that he could find success here at the Funambules and nowhere else. Until he came here he had known more enmity than camaraderie, and separated from it, he felt that he could not breathe.

But a man must eat. Perhaps he could give up his room and sleep out of doors in the summer? But what was he to feed on? Should he beg? Even the pale, tormented Pierrot with all his vicissitudes had not held out without food for more than three days. Gaspard held out till the Sunday on which he heroically gave his last performance.

He put off his visit to Christophe from day to day, but on

the Saturday, when Coquette was whimpering with hunger he set out for the Pont d'Austerlitz. His friends were rather surprised to see him after this long time; plainly they had not expected him. They quickly produced a piece of cake, which Gaspard and his dog shared, and listened to his troubles.

"There," said Christophe gravely, "I knew you'd see reason. The theater won't make anyone's fortune, that's certain. You play your last performance and on Monday go straight to my cousin in the Rue Olympique. I'll tell him to expect you."

"Don't you think he will have taken someone else by now?"

"Of course he has, but I'll persuade him to take you for the present, at least as an assistant. He'll do it for me. Only are you serious and are you sure you won't run away from him?"

"I'm serious," declared Gaspard, but he knew it was a lie. He only considered it as a way out of a tight corner. He would do his new job honestly, but he would still have eyes and ears strained to know of a job for an actor. What would he feel like when he walked along the old, well-known boulevard no longer a member of the many-colored, gay and painted world of the stage, but as an ordinary man, a spectator, one of the crowd.

Sunday came as quickly as a hired mourner to a corpse. Gaspard was in a dreadful state of nerves. Today for the first time he really had stage fright. A first night is not so bad as a last night. What anguish gnawing his heart! To make himself up for the last time, powder his face for the last time, look in the mirror for the last time . . . appear for the last time before an audience which did not understand.

The grave. Everything for the last time.

That evening four well-dressed men were walking along the Boulevard du Temple in a very bad temper. They were talking about the new censorship which threatened to destroy the whole artistic life of France. They were talking about the closing of the Salon. They stopped at the Café Mille Colonnes and the proprietor came to tell them with pride that his wife, who was acting as cashier, was sitting at the door on the throne of Napoleon's sister Elise and that he had bought this item for the trifling sum of four thousand francs. Disgusted, they left the café. Then they went to a publisher who had promised to arrange an edition of selected poems of André Chénier, guillotined just thirty-five years before. The publisher had played them false; he did not mean to get into bad odor with the court. So the disgust and bitterness of the four

artists was intensified. They thought of the luckless André Chénier who had meant to do so much for freedom and who had been killed by fools because he drafted an appeal to the King Capet. In particular they remembered his last words: "Je n'ai rien fait pour le monde! Mais dans la tête, dans la tête je l'ai . . ." And then the blade fell and the thought in his head was lost to the world forever. How many poems and how many songs! The tragic fate of young artists driven from life by the lack of understanding of the world rose before them as clearly as the ugly building of the Temple round which they were walking. Their humor dropped to freezing point.

These four artists were men who played an important part in the world of art. The first was Picard, the author of a comedy in the style of Molière which had failed because it was not understood and was badly acted. There was Fontaine, an architect with a happy touch, who was renovating buildings in the grandiose style of the Tuileries and the Palais Royal. There was Redouté, a painter of flower pieces, whose canvases were to be seen in every exhibition. And finally there was Gérard, the great and famous painter of "Psyche," "The Four Ages," "Corinne," and "Saint Thérèse," the teacher of Bouquet and champion of the new romantic tendency.

A chance walk brought these four men, full of painful thoughts and careless of their surroundings, to the poor quarter in which was the Boulevard du Temple. They passed charcoal shops in cellars, stalls with fish and fruit, and complained in harsh and bitter words of their grief for themselves and others.

"These folk are better off." Fontaine indicated the crowd who gazed at him with happy, carefree faces. "They need not even put on a new smock. They come here to see their rope dancers and they applaud them—and the problem of the needs of art is solved as far as they are concerned."

"But they matter very much just now," objected Gérard. "Real art, good art has got to reach these people too."

"How can art get here, when it can't even fight its way to the Comédie Française?"

"Do you know Jules Janin?"

"The dramatic critic?"

"Yes. He maintains that today, when the official theater is dead, it is being born again quite unnoticed—and not in the grand speeches of the gentlemen at the Comédie."

"It isn't possible to cast pearls before swine," objected

Redouté, "because swine can't recognize pearls. And the pearls fall into the dung heap. So art can't be born in that way."

"Romanticism has greater faith in the common people than in the bourgeois," persisted Gérard. "Look at these faces! There's healthy, unspoiled character in them."

Redouté waved his hand.

"Eh bien! They may have sound character, but they don't worry about things, while you torment yourself and spend your time puzzling how anyone can burn Chénier's poems or imprison Béranger, and how we can have a king whose ideas of art stop with the Church processions."

And they walked on again, looking about them with gloomy, frowning faces.

"Shall we go back?" asked one of them after a time.

"We seem to me to breathe most freely here," said Gérard. "Are we to go back to Prokop and the boredom of the cafés? Those cafés are for funeral guests. Newspapers, billiards . . . you laugh and they come and tell you you're disturbing some half-pay general . . ."

"Then do you want to go to a cabaret?" suggested Fontaine.

"I've nothing against that," smiled Gérard. "It might be good even for our great dramatists to come here from time to time among these shopkeepers and workmen. They might imbibe a little life instead of their artistic theories. . . ."

"Gentlemen, that's heresy," laughed Fontaine. "I don't expect you'd find anything from the walls of the Temple to Pont-aux-Choux which could be called theater without making Thalia blush for shame."

"I don't mean the play but the audience. Your dramatist must keep his eye open here for what makes his audience laugh and cry—so he might reach the real heart of life."

"You may be right. We should all recover here. Our feverish souls would be washed in their sad colors."

"Look, just look—"

Small groups of people passed them with vigorous gestures and loud laughter.

"Tell me this, friends, where do you find such good humor as in the Boulevard du Temple?"

"Hey!" cried Fontaine to one of the groups. "Won't you tell us, friends, where we can buy your good humor?"

Three men stood still in surprise, looked at each other and

laughed still louder. Then one of them plucked up courage and said:

"It's cheap enough, Monsieur, it only costs four sous."

"Where's that?"

"We've been at the Funambules this afternoon, Monsieur. Just you go there. Debureau's playing."

"And is the whole Boulevard in a good temper because Debureau's playing at the Funambules?"

"Of course, Monsieur. We've all been to see him. He knows how to make us laugh."

"Thank you for the information, Monsieur," said Fontaine, bowing politely.

The three artisans returned his greeting with more laughter and passed on.

"Debureau," pondered Gérard. "Where have I heard that name? Wasn't it in the studio of that hard-working young man Bouquet? He painted a picture of a clown not long ago—he wanted to exhibit the picture, but it wasn't accepted."

"I propose, gentlemen, that we should give ear to the voice of the people," was Picard's opinion. "We've got to kill time this evening, let's do it thoroughly."

"Where is the Théâtre des Funambules?" they asked.

"A hundred yards back on the other side."

When they got there they remembered hearing the raucous shouting of the old man as they passed before, but they had paid no attention to him at the time.

"Art speaks with a different voice here and at the Comédie," observed Fontaine.

"And with all respect to the idol of the slums," added Redouté, "one must admit that art speaks in more dulcet tones at the Comédie than here. At least, the voice of Mademoiselle Mars is pleasanter than that raucous roar."

"The muse of the slums hasn't so much time to spend on voice production," answered Gérard.

"Perhaps that's why she's given up talking altogether." Picard pointed to the poster announcing the pantomime of "Harlequin and the Golden Eggs."

The old crier opened his eyes when he saw that these four resplendent élégants were listening to his announcement and going up to the booking office.

"The best seats you have."

"Loges—loges d'avant-scène—the best view in the whole

house," stammered the cashier. She had never sold tickets to anyone like this before.

There was still time before the evening performance began, so they went across to the brasserie opposite to have a bottle of Chablis. This visit to an obscure theater in the slums roused them to a certain gaiety. It seemed to them quite a little adventure. But they drank so as to get more courage and be sure of not running away at the last moment, and also because it pleased them in that mood, there was something boyish about it, like a town boy dressing up in a country boy's smock, or a Paris dandy flirting with a country wench or an innkeeper's daughter. They were as pleased with their idea as with a successful practical joke. Their friends would certainly never believe to what lengths boredom had driven them: to the clown at the Temple.

"Come, friends, it's time."

They paid and crossed the road to the entrance of the Funambules.

Still in a good humor and sizing up the unaccustomed surroundings with ironical remarks, they let themselves be guided by the ouvreuse, and made their way through the auditorium which was filled with impatient spectators. Bags of sweets rustled. Artisans in their best coats sipped liqueur from little glasses while their wives imbibed orangeade.

"They don't wash very often," remarked Fontaine casually.

"But they enjoy themselves more than the jewels and lorgnons of the Opéra," Gérard maintained.

The ouvreuse led them to the front, just under the stage—now they had to duck their heads—"Careful, Messieurs, six steps"—and there they were. She opened the door of the loge for the four friends; she was quite a young girl. Picard felt in his pockets for change while the others were hanging up their coats and hats. He noticed that the girl had tears in her eyes and was making no attempt to conceal them.

"What's the matter?" he asked, giving her the money. "What's made you so sad in this merry theater?"

"Ah, pardon, Monsieur," said the girl, wiping her eyes on a pocket handkerchief which obviously had had to soak up many tears already.

"Tell me what it is, ma petite." Picard bent down to her and the others turned round curiously.



"Ah, mon Dieu, but it is so sad!" answered the girl sadly; "Monsieur Debureau is acting today for the last time."

"Is that so tragic?" asked Picard with a smile.

"It's a great pity. Monsieur Debureau is so splendid and we all like him so much. It was sad even this afternoon and now tonight—now it's really the last time—"

"It seems we've chosen badly, friends. We wanted to forget the sorrows of the world, and we've fallen straight into them."

"Oh, Monsieur Debureau will certainly amuse you. You understand the theater, Messieurs. . . ." And tears streamed down her face.

"Merci, Mademoiselle," Picard bowed. "But tell us why this much loved gentleman is leaving your theater if you all adore him to the point of tears? Has he got a better engagement at the Comédie Française?"

"Non, Monsieur," she sobbed as if her heart would break, "he's very poor. He has nothing, only poverty and hunger. He will have to give up the stage and turn locksmith."

"That's very sad. The Boulevard du Temple doesn't appreciate its artists."

"The people are poor here, Monsieur," she informed him. "No one can help him. And the manager has another actor."

"Better?"

"Mon Dieu, he thinks so."

The three knocks sounded behind the scenes. The girl closed the door of the loge. The friends took their seats, rather out of humor. But they stared attentively at the scene which presented itself to their eyes.

"We shall see who understands the theater best here," said Fontaine, "the manager or the ouvreuse."

On the stage the country folk began their dance, then Harlequin and Columbine entered. They all knew of the unusual visitors and their eyes wandered from time to time to the first loge where the faces of the four distinguished spectators showed palely in the darkness. Picard's lorgnon glittered in the background; it was the first lorgnon ever used in the Funambules.

And then Pierrot came on.

"It's he," said Gérard, "Bouquet's clown."

Pierrot began to act. He alone, it seemed, did not notice the unusual visitors. What did four *élégants* matter to him when he had to say good-by today to his beloved *parterre*? What did anything matter, when this appearance was his last, when the luster

of the soft lights was caressing him for the last time, for the last time the wave of attention and laughter was breaking over him. If he usually played coolly and thoughtfully, a new silence seemed to lie upon him today. Today it seemed more than ever that some unseen hand guided his theatrical adventure through all its difficulties. Looking one way, he tumbled or tossed things another. He received boxes on the ear and passed them on. He was no less amusing than usual. His absorption in other things made it all the more laughable. He was like a carved figure with motionless face, but with eyes alight with both merriment and misery. At times his gestures became freer, he drew them out caressingly. And at times his face quivered with an ironical smile which meant something different each time and was always most eloquent. The others, Harlequin, the clown, Cassandra, all played with great animation and fire. Pierrot hardly took one step to their ten; but for all that he was the most graphic and powerful actor on the stage. At times everything seemed to fly and whirl around him and he stood alone in the midst of it with his wicked, sarcastic smile. And at times when one expected him to strike and wound, the wicked smile—without his face moving a muscle—changed into a strange and satisfied expression of benevolence, shining out from the depths of his soul. Between these two poles his face ran through the whole gamut of moods and emotions. But the line of his mouth never softened into a curve, he never quite smiled. It was all only half-tones, only the reflection of inner emotion and experience. And at the same time he was a character of complete certainty. This Pierrot was an actor who knew it all; he was perfectly sure of his love and his hate; he did not need to feign anything. And with it all that indefinable smile, that indescribable expression in which were mingled hypocrisy, grief, disappointment and faith, and which accompanied each one of his actions and his unspoken words.

The curtain fell for the intermission. The people down below applauded and so did the four friends in the loge. The actors bowed, Harlequin and Columbine smiled and blew kisses, as did Cassandra. But Pierrot did not bow, he stood motionless, he did not even incline his head. His white face was stony, like the face of a corpse. Only his eyes moved slowly and humbly from one person to the next, saying something sad within him. They were saying good-by. No one knew it; only the ouvreuse right at the back, a few musicians under the podium—and the four friends when Pierrot's gaze made its way to them.

"Courage, Pierrot!" Gérard whispered when their eyes met.

But Pierrot did not recognize him; his face turned upwards to the gallery, where he could not recognize faces, and remained thus till the curtain fell at last. It seemed, so motionless did he stand, as though he would sooner have exposed himself to the blows of a whip than to applause. And the self-denial, the tortured passion that there was in that motionless figure!

Intermission.

"Orangeade! Chocolates! Figs!" sounded from below. A wave of sound, smoke and cheap perfume rose from the parterre.

In the loge no one spoke for a moment. At last Redouté asked:

"What did you whisper, Gérard, a moment ago?"

"Did I whisper something?"

They spoke gravely and quietly, in undertones.

"You whispered—'courage!' " said Fontaine.

"The fellow's magnificent," said Picard.

"Yes," agreed Gérard, "and his farewell is too sad."

"He seemed to me to be smiling at the whole world, all round him, at us, the audience, the actors . . ."

"And at the same time complaining of the whole world. I was never sure whether there was malice or kindness in his face."

"I should like to know the fellow."

"I met him," insisted Gérard, "though unfortunately I never saw him act before."

"Did you see what he has in his eyes?"

"I did. Sadness at all of his comic exploits."

The people below were shouting and laughing. It could be heard through the cries of the vendors and the singing of refrains in chorus. Gérard smiled:

"I think we are in agreement—in our opinion of this clown."

"I kept glancing at you others during the performance," admitted Picard. "I could not believe my eyes, and I wanted to have it confirmed."

"I've never seen Pierrot acted like that before. Of course it's all foolery, outrage, revolution— But what an actor! The fellow made a masquerade into a great art!"

"He'll be wasted making his locks and keys," remarked Gérard gloomily.

"André Chénier," Redouté reminded them. "He's done nothing, but it's all in his head. . . ."

"Diable! quelle vie de chien!"

The parterre grew quiet, the lamplighter put out some of the candles. The play went on and drew to a close. The four friends felt more confident now that they knew they were all in agreement, and expressed their pleasure in their loud laughter, their remarks, and their absorbed expressions.

"The lad really has courage," cried Fontaine, as Pierrot pulled a candle from his bosom during a slow march across the stage, and held it before him as if in a religious procession. The people below broke into appreciative chuckles; they all understood the caricature of the King's absorption in the Church.

"The candle doesn't matter—look at his face!" said Picard excitedly. "Ah, mes amis, I could have done with that fellow in my 'Bourgeois.' And do you know, I believe he'd have saved it! What an actor! What an actor!"

"I'm sorry for him," Gérard burst out in spite of himself. "I'm afraid he's got tears in his eyes. It's a despairing expression."

The play drew to a close. The noise on the stage increased; everything was whirling and dancing, only Pierrot grew more and more like a rock battered by the seas. When he had to throw and miss one could not tell whether he did it on purpose or because his sight was dim with tears. When he received a blow one wondered whether he was pretending not to feel it or was numb with misery. It was a desperate sight for a sensitive artist who had been let into the secret of what was going on behind the scenes of this foolish comedy, while the people down below shouted and laughed. But Pierrot seemed happy; each burst of laughter or silence at a moment of suspense added a trace of satisfaction, emotion and happiness to his smile. At the end, however, when Harlequin had secured his golden treasure and was locked in Columbine's embrace and all the others were leaping round in a joyous finale, Pierrot stood in their midst like a statue on a deserted sepulcher, his own sepulcher. Waves of delight flowed past him from the public, but other waves washed the glitter of the stage from his face as he stood close to the loge, stripped naked, as it were, with his face lifted up towards the hopeless future. And his eyes said: I wanted to give you so much, so much, and you wouldn't take it. It was not the despair of the suicide, it was resignation and calm as if beside the coffin of some dear one killed by an envious and unjust world.

Gaspard Debureau had buried Pierrot of the Funambules.

"What an unhappy smile," whispered Redouté.

"I can't bear it. Come, friends, it's the end."

They rose and took a last look at the white figure on the stage. At the door the young ouvreuse had her handkerchief pressed to her mouth.

"Fine performance," Picard said to her.

"Most unhappy I've ever seen," added Redouté sadly.

## VI

### DESIREE

IN the course of the next half hour the road outside the Funambules offered the usual view of a departing audience discussing the evening's show. Then the supers came out, their make-up quickly removed. The last shops, living like parasites on the theater, put up their shutters. And then one by one the actors and actresses came out; with a slow or hurrying step, looking round to see if anyone was waiting for them, they drew their cloaks about them and went their way. For Marianne and Toinette fiacres were waiting with an elegant frac within. They drove off, looking round proudly at their colleagues getting wet in the gentle drizzle which was just beginning to fall. The heavens were weeping on the grave of Pierrot.

The four men who had left the theater half an hour earlier came striding back. Their shoes echoed on the road, they almost ran. Some resolution had brought them back, they hardly knew why. One of them half-opened the door of the theater which was not yet locked, and was about to enter, but just then someone came upstairs with slow, heavy steps. Picard, who was just going in, stepped back and asked quickly:

"Pardon, Monsieur, is Monsieur Debureau, who acted Pierrot this evening, still down there?"

"I'm Monsieur Debureau," said the man and stood still.

"You're Monsieur Debureau?" cried Picard, and he and the others, who had come close, looked curiously into his face.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" asked Pierrot quietly. He was dressed now as a poor Parisian of the quartier Saint Honoré.

"Would you care to walk a little way with us?"

Gaspard convinced himself at a glance that in the company of these distinguished-looking men a poor man had nothing to fear, and they convinced themselves that the ouvreuse had not lied. The threadbare blouse, frayed at the cuffs and hem, the narrow, patched trousers were convincing signs that the creator of Pierrot lived in anything but affluence. Only his face remained

expressive: the glossy, dark, slightly curling hair, the high forehead with a few lines, deeply sunken eyes, thin face and thin lips above a square chin. His expression had the same changeful look, the mysterious secret of a rich soul. Now, clad in ordinary clothes, he seemed to show more timidity, irresolution and uncertainty. Crowning all like a heavy stone was the grief for this evening.

The four unknown men took him along with them, and he had not the will to gainsay them. None of them spoke. Gaspard was lost in his own thoughts and did not even try to understand the purpose of these remarkable strangers.

They stopped before a large restaurant.

"You'll have a bite of supper with us?"

"I can't afford it, gentlemen, forgive me."

"That's what we want to talk about," they answered him, and they all trooped in.

They asked him no questions and ordered supper for him. By now Gaspard had decided what they were: some philanthropists who wanted to give him a meal. Perhaps they had taken a fancy to him, perhaps their evening at the theater had cheered a mood of depression and they had picked him out at random to give him a meal in return. Inwardly he smiled ironically. He knew this casual human generosity and had at times had to choke it off; but it was a long time since he had had a meal, so he accepted the alms, his hunger triumphing over his humiliated pride.

"A votre santé," said one of the gentlemen, emptying his glass. "Don't you recognize me?"

"Maître Gérard!" cried Gaspard, recognizing in him the visitor to Bouquet's studio. And now he had a new idea: these people were painters and would want to paint him. He was prepared to refuse; it was not his ambition to be a model for pictures which lay about in studios, refused because their subject was unsuitable.

But no one began about painting. The four men drank to him, then a look passed between them and Gérard began. It was like an examination, but it was done with such delicacy that Gaspard answered readily and with interest.

"Is it true that you have to leave the stage?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"I go for my week's wages for the last time tomorrow, and tomorrow I report at my new job."

"With the locksmith?"

"Yes. Who told you?"

"Never mind just now. We know you're leaving because you can't live on the pittance your manager pays you."

"That's just it."

"What are your wages?"

"Nine francs a week."

They could not suppress their astonishment.

"But that's sheer robbery! The man's making a fortune out of you!"

Gaspard shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"I've tried to stick it, but I can't starve any longer. I've had cramp and my head aches all the time. I couldn't go on."

"Nine francs a week! It's outrageous!"

"Before that I had eighteen; that was quite all right."

"Eighteen!" wondered the artists, remembering the story of the throne of Napoleon's sister which they had heard that afternoon. For the price of that throne this actor would have been able to live for five years!

They drank, and then the voice of Fontaine began quietly but with emphasis:

"Monsieur Debureau, we came to your theater in a very bad humor. We heard that you were leaving and we saw you act. You surprised us very much. We are sure you are a talented actor and we think it would be a great pity if you had to leave the stage."

Gaspard blushed at this unexpected praise, spoken in such a sure and decided way by people who must understand art and the stage very well.

"So we went away very sad," Fontaine continued, "we were so sorry about you. Do you know André Chénier?"

"I'm afraid not. Who is he?"

"He was a poet, and they killed him before he had been able to give the world all the songs that he had in his heart."

"Oh!"

"Now listen carefully please, and don't misunderstand what I'm going to say."

"I'll do my best, Monsieur."

"We weren't sad only this evening, we had been for days and it would have gone on for days more. I repeat that we believe in your talent and we think it intolerable that you should have to leave the stage because of poverty. We want you to go on acting."

"It isn't possible, Messieurs."

"That's why we invited you here. We are not rich but we



are artists and we're not getting on too badly. We consider it our duty to give back to Art what we have had from her—at least in part. We want to give you some assistance."

"No," said the astonished Debureau.

"Yes," said Gérard firmly. "We aren't giving you a gift. We have decided among ourselves to make you a monthly allowance."

Debureau was nearly in tears over this unexpected, unusual, quite exceptional kindness.

"But it's impossible—impossible . . ."

"We ask you to try and understand. We aren't doing it only for your sake—we're doing it for ourselves as well. We want to buy a clear conscience. If you feel it your vocation to be a true artist and say something to the world through your acting, you must accept it."

"But how can I?"

"You owe it to yourself and to us."

"Forgive me, gentlemen, it's so unexpected and incredible. And it's such a tremendous thing, I can't even thank you—I have no words—People like you—have never spoken to me before!"

"Is it something so extraordinary?"

"Indeed it is, Messieurs . . . you are somehow different from the others . . ."

They all smiled and Gérard said gravely:

"He may be right, friends, and I know why."

They turned to him smiling with eager interest.

"Because we have been the first to see him. We may be proud of that some day."

Gaspard did not really know whether he was in jest or earnest.

"Eh bien, cher Monsieur Debureau, do you accept our proposal?"

"I dare not—"

"You do accept! Let's drink to it!"

The glasses flashed and clinked.

"Today is the ninth. On the ninth of each month one of us will come and give you—"

"If you will allow me, gentlemen. I accept your kind offer which makes you more than human in my eyes. But I have one condition."

"And that is?"

"I don't want to have more than I had before. I got along

on that quite nicely. Just the extra nine francs a week that I had before."

"We wanted to give you more," objected Fontaine.

"I do beg you to agree to my condition. It makes it a kind of intervention of justice and not a gift that I need be ashamed of."

"All right," said the friends, "we accept."

"Each of us will contribute nine francs a month—that will double your wages."

"And you'll come and see the show now and then?" begged Debureau.

"When we can manage it, certainly—some Sunday. And now, this is the first installment."

Thirty-six francs were on the table. Debureau picked them up with trembling hands.

"And thanks, Monsieur Debureau, for understanding us," said Fontaine, rising.

"Thank you, Messieurs."

Their farewells were quite short, but all were happy.

All through the night the beauty which Gaspard had brought home with him was growing. What game was life playing with him? It had waved Harlequin's magic wand and made him a beggar, stripped of the tattered hopes with which he sometimes glowed; another wave of the enchanter's wand, and he was as rich as a king who had just been given the most precious gift: faith in the human heart. Everything was glowing today. It was a pity that he had no one to tell of his ardent happiness. Today at last he had been given back faith in himself. There were actually people, educated strangers, who thought it worth a sacrifice to keep him on the stage. Nothing could equal the glory of that evening, not the glitter of thousands nor a fortune of millions. The four friends went home happy, too.

Gaspard Debureau was saved for his theater. Bertrand was certainly surprised when Gaspard informed him next day that he accepted the reduced wage and would go on acting. He supposed that Gaspard wanted to try it a few days longer, but he did not mind much, because Laurent, who was to have taken Debureau's part, had been asking for a raise in salary. A Pierrot for nine paltry francs, and a Pierrot who pleased the people, was not to be thrown away. He would have had to pay anyone else thirty more.

The day after the four friends had paid Gaspard his little pension, he had been round at once in the morning with cheerful apologies to tell Christophe that he was abandoning the distinguished career of locksmith. And on the way back he chose a longer route round the walls of gardens, so that at least he could whistle, if he might not dance and sing, in his joyful mood. And as he passed a shabby little house, the wind, which was blowing in his face, made a sudden little gust which blew several sheets of paper down from one of the windows. Gaspard looked up and saw in the window the face of a pretty, fair-haired girl who was looking to see where the wind was carrying her papers. At any other time Gaspard would certainly have walked on shaking his head, sad at heart that Fate had not sent the girl into his arms instead of the white pages. But today he was in high spirits, and that gave him courage.

"Holà, Mademoiselle, let the wind carry you down!" he cried. "And don't be afraid, I'll catch you!"

"My letter!" cried the girl anxiously as the wind blew the letter right into the middle of a puddle left by the previous day's rain. Gaspard hurried after the flying papers; he saved some of them, the others he could only fish out of the mud. "Oh, thank you, Monsieur, you're very kind," the fair-haired girl called after him and rewarded him with a sweet smile.

"Il n'y a pas de quoi," said Gaspard, "are you coming to fetch these papers?"

"Hélas, I can't," said the girl sadly, and added in explanation: "My aunt has locked me in. I can't come down."

"Shall I bring them to you?"

"Would you be so kind? But please don't read them!"

"No," promised Gaspard, but curiosity compelled him to break his word. Whom are you writing to, pretty maiden? Going up the stairs he glanced at the written sheets. "Mon cher . . ." Voyons!

He was up at the top now and did not know which door to turn to, but there was a knocking from one of them.

"Here, Monsieur!"

"How shall I give you your letter?"

"Push it under the door, please. That's it. You are really very kind."

"Yes," agreed Gaspard. "I think I've earned a small reward."

"I haven't anything, Monsieur."

"I don't mean that. Perhaps I deserve to see you a moment."

"I can only show myself at the window. I really haven't the key."

"Perhaps some other time?" proposed Gaspard.

"Do you really think so?" whispered the girl on the other side of the door.

"Tomorrow?"

The girl seemed to consider.

"Promise me."

"Tomorrow—afternoon. . . . Come here then."

"Oh, thank you. Then I'll return you the letter that I didn't give you with the others."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I'll give it back to you on condition that you give me something else instead."

"What sort of thing?"

"Any trifle, to remind me of this meeting—and of the letter which fell from heaven—even if it wasn't meant for me."

"Did you read it?" cried the girl, alarmed.

"No, but I imagine it wasn't intended for me."

"You mustn't think badly of me, Monsieur, it was meant as much for you as for anyone else."

Gaspard did not understand this, but he persisted in demanding a substitute.

"Will this do?" And a small piece of yellow ribbon appeared under the door.

"Splendid!" he cried. "You are very kind. When do you want me to bring it back to you?"

"Tomorrow at five," whispered the hidden creature.

"Tomorrow at five," repeated Gaspard. There was a moment's silence.

"What are you doing? Are you still there?"

"Yes," Gaspard replied. "I was fondling your door."

"Please go now. My aunt will soon be back and she'll be so cross."

"I'm off. But I shan't forget you for a single instant."

And he left, bearing off his trophy in triumph. The first gift from a woman, the first pledge of comradeship: a yellow ribbon. What had it adorned? Shoulder, hair, sleeve? What did it matter? For Gaspard it contained the whole mystery of a girl's being.

That evening he wore it all through the play under his frilled shirt—against his heart.

Gaspard laid at the feet of the unknown apparition at the window all his unfulfilled longings, all his romantic dreams and loveliest fancies. All day he regretted not having asked his beauty what her name was. Supposing she were to move? Suppose she didn't come? Five o'clock found him on the spot sanctified by memories of yesterday, quivering to the very depths.

He did not believe he could love this girl. He was too easily filled with longings and tremors by chance adventures which often never happened or happened only in his dreams. One could not say that he drank life with full draughts, rather he lived it with his whole heart. A meeting or a half-glimpsed look furnished him with a whole glorious love adventure. Embraces were not the most important thing; they were rather a necessity to which he yielded out of propriety and consideration. But his heart often lived more passionately on looks picked up in the street, on chance caught perfumes and smiles meant for others, than on the fire of flesh and blood. And thus he gave too much of his love to women who never belonged to him, and did not yet believe that the likeness of this girl might penetrate to the bottom of his soul.

As five o'clock struck the girl appeared. Gaspard, who was walking up and down on the opposite side of the road, noticed another woman's face appear at a closed window on the first floor at the same moment.

"Your aunt is watching us," he warned the approaching girl as he bowed to her.

"That doesn't matter," she smiled, "I've told her about you."

"Wasn't she angry?"

"Not a bit. Have you got my ribbon?"

"Oh," said Debureau politely, "I've left it in my costume."

"What costume?"

"I'm an actor, Mademoiselle," he replied timidly and waited to see what sort of impression this confession would produce.

"Oh!" She clapped her hands. "What do you act?"

"I act a wicked and merry Pierrot."

"But you aren't wicked?"

"No, but I can act it."

"I'll come and see you act some time."

"And I shall come every day, if you let me—here, to your street—at least to look at your window, Mademoiselle . . . ?"

"Guess."

"Désirée," he said because he liked the name.

"How did you know?" she cried, startled. "Who told you?"

He smiled happily.

"It must be destiny. I guessed it. We shall not part company too soon, Mademoiselle."

Désirée had, besides her sweet name, a lot of fine golden hair (which darkened in the shadow of little waves and ringlets), dark blue eyes, a transparent face, and a pretty rosy mouth.

"Shall we go into the Luxembourg gardens for a little while?" he suggested.

She agreed. The streets were cold since yesterday's rain and approaching autumn had painted the treetops in the avenue with its sharp breath. Gaspard was very happy with the girl's little footsteps crunching beside his on the tawny-colored paths.

"May I ask you, Mademoiselle Désirée, who you are?"

She was not embarrassed at all.

"My aunt has a big hat shop. I work with her in the business."

"A modiste," he said admiringly. Modistes were the first among grisettes, the aristocracy of the young working girls who brightened life for the whole of masculine Paris. Laundresses, shopgirls and sweetmeat sellers must be grateful if Fate threw in their way from time to time a cavalier who could pay for their supper now and then, give them a new, beribboned hat, perhaps even be seen with them on Sundays au Robinson and send them bunches of lilies of the valley as a farewell gift. The modistes were highly born ladies compared with them. They had the right to be capricious, coquette, haughty. They could pick and choose, they could ridicule you and turn up their noses at gifts they did not like. They had the tradition of petty tyrants, which meant that one had to have something in one's pocket if one wished to ingratiate them. That is why the path rocked under Gaspard's feet and his hopes tumbled about his ears.

"Has your aunt a very big business?"

"Three large salles. All the duchesses in the Faubourg Saint-Germain buy their hats from her." Désirée smiled gaily. Gaspard thought he saw traces of pride and hauteur in her smile.

"Then why do you live in that ugly street?"

"It's a whim of Auntie's, she likes it there because it's not far from the Luxembourg and we can smell the acacias in summer."

"I see."

"But our apartment is lovely inside. Auntie knows lots of travelers who have brought her lovely things from India and

China and Spain. And then all the duchesses are her friends and shower kindnesses upon her."

"Is she such an intimate friend of theirs?" asked Gaspard wonderingly.

"Yes. Auntie makes most exquisite hats and all these ladies are very grateful to her. Oh, you should see all the lovely things our house is full of. I like being at home because it's so pretty there." And the girl paused, staring before her as if she were lovingly calling up before her the image of her beloved home. "A paper gris marbré on the walls—beautiful pictures—a white majolica stove in the corner—lovely thick carpets—"

"It must be lovely to live there," sighed Gaspard.

"What's your house like? Have you a white majolica stove as well?"

"Yes," said Gaspard, feeling that it was better to tell a lie than admit that he had no stove at all and that the mansard in the Faubourg du Temple had never known from its own experience the meaning of the word warmth.

"And gilt chairs covered in velvet in the salon?" The girl's curiosity was excited.

"She likes luxury," thought Gaspard, "je suis perdu." But he said: "Covered in velvet, yes, but not gilt."

"Oh, what a pity. I like it so much when the gold turns all rosy at sunset with the reflection. Don't you like it?"

"She's poetic," thought Gaspard in terror, "I shall never win her with my tongue-tied ways."

"I saw some perfectly lovely furniture from Utrecht at the Duchesse d'Artois' house."

"Have you been there?" asked poor Pierrot.

"Yes. To a dance there. Enormous windows and lanterns and fireworks in the garden."

"But the Duchesse d'Artois hasn't got a garden—she lives in the Boulevard."

"Then it was somewhere else," Désirée cut him short sharply. "Last winter I went to a different place nearly every night. I can't remember them all."

"Didn't you go to the theater?" Gaspard tried to bring the conversation on to a field where he would feel more sure of himself.

"Yes. The Opéra. It was glorious."

"Where did you sit?"

"Down below. Where else should I sit?"

"The best people sit in the logs."

"I know. Where else should they sit? I sat there too."

"Who were you with?"

"No one. I was alone."

Gaspard looked at Désirée curiously. Listen, *ma petite*, you can't take me in. I've been that way myself. That's just the way I've made myself drunk on glamorous fancies and empty dreams.

But Désirée looked so serious and her eyes shone so convincingly that Gaspard's thoughts inclined on the side of belief, which of course meant losing hope again. It was a pity, because he liked the girl more and more. Her mischievous manner piqued and stirred him; he would have liked to have her less careless and smiling. On the other hand her high spirits were attractive, they made him feel light-hearted too and helped him to forget his own dreary life. This was how he had imagined the girl who should go through life by his side: smiling, pleasant, tender and cordial! But the balls and the majolica stove spoilt it all.

"What made you come out with me?" he asked, looking a little defiant.

She was startled for a moment, as if she guessed the cause of the question and was a little sorry for letting her boasting run away with her.

"Why not?" she replied uncertainly. "You interested me—and then—our meeting was so queer, wasn't it? And I like actors. I wanted you to talk to me about the theater."

"About the theater?" Gaspard's hopes rose again, he began to think where to begin.

"Not today," said Désirée. "I must go back now. Auntie will be cross if I stay out too long."

Debureau was glad. He intended to make up some tremendous story about the theater by tomorrow, and make himself out to be at least Achilles in the eyes of this girl. They returned to the path by which they had come. Only a few people were about; the cold had driven mothers with children and pairs of lovers to the warmth of their homes. It was too cold here. Only a few greenish statues looked down on Gaspard who was racking his brains for something pretty to say to his *Dulcibella*. Nothing occurred to him, but he caught sight of a chestnut seller who had set up his barrow just at the corner of the garden wall.

"The first chestnuts this year," he said. "Do you like them?"

"Very much," she replied. "How lovely they smell."

Some coppers clinked in Gaspard's palm, destined for tomor-



row's dinner, and he bought the chestnuts. He turned and offered them politely to his lady.

Désirée took one in her slim fingers and put it into her mouth, her teeth bit into it, the shell cracked, and the poor girl cried out in pain as she burned her tongue.

"Oh, no," cried Gaspard, "that's the shell!"

"Couldn't you say so before?"

She spat out the bitten chestnut. Gaspard handed her another, but Désirée did not venture to take it. Her face was red with embarrassment, and she was biting her lips. She quickened her pace.

Gaspard peeped at her sideways. Even angry and upset she was very charming. How her eyes flashed! But just then a thought occurred to him. She had said she was fond of chestnuts—she very nearly said she bought them three times a day. But she put one into her mouth in its shell and might have broken her teeth on it. Gaspard knew well enough how to eat chestnuts, but you, *ma petite*, you've never had them in your mouth before!

They walked along side by side in silence and Gaspard was uncertain whether Désirée would spring at him and scratch his eyes out in revenge for the chestnuts, or whether she would burst into tears like a little girl. Her eyes looked ready for either.

They had almost reached the house before Gaspard got up his courage to speak. He felt he must open a way of honorable retreat for poor Désirée.

"We've had a jolly time joking this afternoon," he said with his warmest smile, "and now we'll speak the truth, won't we?"

Perhaps it was the fault of the shade of irony in his smile that things happened as they did.

"Joking?" she answered pitifully. "It was all serious—serious." Sobs smothered her voice, she buried her tear-stained face in her hands, and before Gaspard could think of what to do, Désirée had vanished into the house.

Gaspard walked to and fro in vain. The windows remained closed. All that he had left of this rosy afternoon was a bag of cold chestnuts. The confounded, treacherous chestnuts.

## VII

### THE SCIENCE OF PIERROT

FROM the point of view of both Gaspard and Désirée it was all very sad, but in the eyes of a third person who took no direct part in it, it would certainly have appeared quite otherwise. Anyone must have smiled at so comic an affair. A lovesick Celadon, seeking to please his lady, buys her a dainty which convicts her of untruthfulness—and in such a way! Making her burn her tongue on the hot shell! Her grave, heroic face while she did it! At first glance it is thoroughly funny. Only a very fine nature would find in it a trace of sadness, disillusionment, and be able to find regret for the dream so cruelly stripped bare and hurled to the ground.

Gaspard needed to amuse himself and free himself from his own impressions if he was to reveal the innate comedy in such a situation, so he forced himself to vigorous thought as to why things were so and on what premises they were based. This problem interested him increasingly and he had occasion to return to it in his daily meetings on the stage with the great soul of the audience at the Funambules. Why did the people laugh at this and not at that? And why did they often burst into roars of laughter at something everyday and accidental, and not at something which had been carefully prepared?

"What is comedy really?" he tried asking his colleagues once.

"It's asking questions like that," they told him jeeringly. And Félix said:

"Listen to our Aristotle!"

So he took to observing these things himself. After the agreement with Gérard and his friends he considered it his duty even more.

The first conclusion that he came to was that a thing has to be human to be comic. A bridge is not laughable in itself, nor is a forest; no stage setting can in itself raise a laugh, even if it contains twisted towers and giant chickens. The ridiculous element only enters with the actor and the relationship of things

to him. Things and animals do not count. A dog doing comic tricks would not be amusing, but a dog dressed up as a man was irresistible. An old hat was rather touching, but when Harlequin put it on his head it seemed foolish and laughable.

"Do your bit and don't bother about anyone else," was Félix's maxim. "Don't think of the audience. It won't make any difference to your work."

"D'you know what I've noticed?" said Gaspard. "The more women there are in the audience, the less people laugh."

Félix was surprised at this idea, but he shook his head. It seemed to him fantastic.

"An actor should attend to the stage, not the audience," he informed the inquisitive Pierrot.

But Gaspard could not fail to see a thing of which he was aware, as it were, with the whole of his body. He had noticed that the difference in the volume of applause when the theater was partly empty and when it was full was not proportionate to the numbers there. In a full theater the applause was multiplied. It was as if people echoed each other's laughter, as if the laughter of one spectator rebounded from three of his neighbors. There was always this multiple echo, like the echo in the mountains when you shout aloud and the rocks fling your shout back to you again from different sides.

And the point about the women Gaspard explained to himself in his own way. He knew from his own sisters that women never saw the funny side of practical jokes. It was because they lived perpetually in a state of emotional disturbance. Gaspard himself never smiled or laughed if he was anxious or excited. But his father used to laugh after dinner, if someone made a good joke; and the boys used to laugh in the evening at the brasserie as they sat over a jug of wine.

Gaspard puzzled and puzzled over this till it came to him clearly that folk only have a feeling for the comic side of things if they are in a calm, undisturbed frame of mind. If their feelings are disturbed in any way they don't laugh and they can't see a joke. Men are better able to free themselves from emotion than women, who are always worked up about something, and therefore men have a keener sense of humor. But even they only have it when there are a lot of them together; no one laughs when he is by himself. The audience laughs when the stage creates a kind of relationship between them and the actors in which they all feel at home.

This was the conclusion to which Gaspard came. What he was not able to define precisely, he could feel subconsciously. He had roughly fixed the conditions within which an actor can make an audience laugh. But how this laughter originated and what was its immediate cause was another question.

It all arose out of a thing which he had noticed himself and had made his life's principle: the need for laughter! It was like fresh air, or salt, or water. There were even proverbs about it: laugh and grow fat, a merry heart goes all the way—and plenty of others. If folk needed laughter, they must have some feeling for it; it must be a response to something, a result or a confirmation of something, or the exposure of a mistake. This last was probably the best of all.

I go on the stage, thought Gaspard Debureau, the audience wait for me to reach the spot that I am aiming at; but I trip over Harlequin and fall down. There's your mistake. The people have made a mistake; that surprises them and makes them laugh. Or I want to cut off Harlequin's head, I brandish the knife, but I get caught behind on a nail and fall down myself. There you have your mistake, surprise, misfit. The gulf between the original expectation of the public and the thing which I actually do. The more I am able to work it up, the stronger the contrast is between the two, the more amused people are.

The element of surprise is most important, too. If I'm too open with my intentions and they see beforehand that I mean to fall, they don't laugh. The thing must happen to me involuntarily, if possible against my will. If I fall down or sit on a pitchfork; if I step backwards and bump into Harlequin, who is doing the same—these are occasions of mirth which happen to me against my will. In these situations I am like a thing and not like a person—one must always remember that. But never be monotonous.

Get one's effects with objects and situations; appear to have lost one's will but capture it again when they are beginning to count on its loss.

There was one thing which hindered Gaspard because it vexed him. This was the inhuman element which he suspected in the laughter of the audience. If the butcher in the parterre were to fall down, he would not laugh. But he laughs at me! If an unexpected flowerpot fell on his head, he would be furious! If it happens to me, he thinks it an excellent joke. Any mishap with which the clown meets on the stage and which makes him stagger or fall on his nose is screamingly funny, though the same thing

happening to us in real life would only make us angry. This seemed to Gaspard to show the malice of human beings, who rejoiced when a mishap did not strike them, but somebody else, and were glad to catch life making a mistake in the address.

Clément Sanson had often talked to Gaspard about a Spanish gentleman called Don Quixote and had often brought him forward as an example. Gaspard himself remembered this hero now as he thought of the vicissitudes of a clown on the stage.

## VIII

### LOVE WITHOUT SLIPPERS

HE ought to have been vexed with Désirée for lying to him and making herself out to be rich and important, but he could not find it in his heart. Everything about her was so childish; and the naïve and innocent lie, which he ought to have seen through from the beginning, was only an expression of her longing for wealth and a happy life. Gaspard was really glad of it, and glad that pretty Désirée was not so completely separated from him as majolica stoves from his cold mansard.

He tried to imagine what truth there was in her story. That she was a modiste would certainly be true, also the aunt who remembered better days. The furniture might even be upholstered in velvet. But balls and dances, hardly. Perhaps she had been allowed to watch from the gallery when she had brought some lady her hat at the last moment. But dancing with young noblemen? No. Gaspard was doubtful about that, partly because he was most unwilling to believe it.

He walked to and fro under the windows for a long time, staring heedlessly upwards, when one of the windows was suddenly opened, a girl whom he did not know looked out and resolutely signaled to him to come up.

The aunt!—shot through Gaspard's head like lightning, and his first thought was the same as that of most young men who have been having secret meetings with a girl behind her guardian's back—to run away. But his grief at not seeing Désirée for so long and the longing to catch a glimpse of her triumphed over the fit of cowardice. Deliberately, then, but with determination, he climbed the stairs.

The door which he remembered was open. He heard a little cry inside, and then the girl who had called him came hurrying out; she took him firmly by the sleeve and pulled him inside. Gaspard had no time to resist or reflect. The door slammed and he stood in a dark little hall; but the energetic young woman pulled him further till he found himself in a room with two windows. In a fraction of a second Gaspard realized that those

were the windows looking on the street; in another fraction of a second he looked for the majolica stove. A poor, battered open fireplace was all he found. The whole room looked poverty stricken. Compared with his mansard it came off best simply because girlish taste had managed to find some way of ornamenting the stained walls and mended curtains.

"There. I've had enough of it!" said the energetic young woman and wiped her forehead as if perspiring after hard work.

"My name is . . ." Gaspard began but she cut him short.

"I know who you are. My name's Annette."

Gaspard said nothing. He was trying in vain to understand what was going on round him.

"There she is, your Désirée!" cried Annette. "Can't you see her?"

Gaspard turned round and noticed for the first time that Désirée was lying on a threadbare old sofa, muffled in rags and shawls, with her face buried in the bedclothes as if in tears or despair. Only her hair was visible.

"Désirée!" he exclaimed very gently, coming close to her and softly touching her hair.

"Go away!" sobbed Désirée and buried her face still deeper.

"You behave, or I'll box your ears!" said Annette threateningly and sat down in the easy chair which was also in its last agony.

"Could you please explain to me what's happened, and why—all this—" Debureau turned to her.

"Sit down," she said briefly. "Not there, it's only got three legs and is there for ornament. Sit by her on the sofa. If she kicks you, push her off. That's it."

Gaspard did as she told him.

"I'll explain the whole business," she went on.

"No!" came the smothered voice of Désirée.

"Yes. And in the first place I have to give you the following piece of information: the young person by the name of Désirée is a goose."

Gaspard accepted this assurance calmly, though he was sorry for the tearful Désirée.

"To play at being a sheltered miss," Annette went on, "is all right for a little. But not forever! Désirée and I have been living together in this moldy hole for two years now. Of course she doesn't deserve to be taken care of the way I do, not by a long

way. But that's beside the point. Dear Monsieur Debureau, I condole with you on ever having met her!"

"Shut up!" cried Désirée excitedly.

"Perhaps you'd like to tell him yourself?"

Désirée buried herself once more helplessly in her sofa.

"She got to know you and she told you a whole lot of nonsense. I know all about it. I played the part of the aunt. Only it's all quite different, as you can see for yourself."

"I knew," said Gaspard, "that Mademoiselle Désirée was telling me her dreams—not talking about reality . . ."

"You put it very prettily. She lied like print. She wanted to make herself out nicer than she is. And she did the job so thoroughly that she couldn't see any way out."

"It isn't so very bad," said Gaspard, hoping to cheer his lady love of whom he could still see nothing but her quivering golden curls.

"It's worse than you think," replied Annette, at whose energy Gaspard could not help smiling inwardly. "If you plucked up courage and pulled those rags off her, you'd find her dressed like Eve in Paradise."

"And if your sight's good you'll see that I'm wearing the skirt she wore to go for a walk in the park with you, and the shoes which pattered beside you so charmingly."

"You've taken them away from her?"

"Yes—just as she did from me yesterday—and will again tomorrow."

"What d'you mean?"

"We've only got one between us."

It was an unexpected solution even for Gaspard.

"But I thought that modistes . . ."

"Who told you? You can see our work over there."

In the corner behind the sofa lay a pile of underlinen, obviously waiting to be mended.

"And one day when we had no work and were very hungry, we thought one pair of boots was enough. The other pair bought our supper and breakfast too."

"You sold them?" asked Gaspard, horrified.

"They're at the pawnshop."

"And the skirt?"

"Our landlord took it because we owed him rent."

"The wicked old wretch!"



"So as we've only got one out-of-door costume, we wear it in turns."

Gaspard understood everything now, even why Désirée had not been able to open the door to him when he brought back her letter which had blown away. Annette got up and went up to him. He had risen, too.

"Monsieur Debureau," she said sadly, "I know I've been telling you things that no woman ought to let out. To be a beggar isn't so bad, but to hold the fact up to admiration is the utmost foolishness. All the more when I don't want to beg anything for myself or her."

"I assure you," stammered Gaspard, "that—that—it's quite the other way—I appreciate the courage which . . ."

"Listen. I did it because I'm sorry for you and I didn't want my conscience to prick me. Désirée's a good girl," and she stroked the fair hair which was now lying motionless on the coverlet, "but she'd never have had the courage to tell you she's been lying. The letter you picked up wasn't written to anybody, she just writes them to—dreams. And I felt so awful when I saw you walking up and down outside such a long time, and knew how sorry Désirée was . . ."

"Was she sorry?" whispered Gaspard happily.

"I think she loves you," said Annette calmly. "Ask her yourself. I'm going to give you the opportunity, for it's my day to go out and I'm going now!"

"Mademoiselle Annette, I can't tell you how grateful I am. . . ."

"Yes." Annette stood still and threw a little cape over her shoulders. "That's the point. You can be grateful to me in two ways. Look here: Désirée's very sad, it's true, but she's a sensible girl. There are two things you can do now you know everything—go or stay. I advise you to go. You can be quite easy in your mind about it. I promise she won't commit suicide and that I'll talk her round and cheer her up again."

"Mademoiselle Annette," said Gaspard urgently, "don't insult me, please. I want to stay." And he ended with an indirect confession: "I think I love Mademoiselle Désirée, too."

"Good," said Annette. "I'll slam the door. Don't open it to anyone. I'll be back in two hours. Au revoir. Good-by, chérie."

The golden curls did not even move.

Annette's footsteps pattered across the hall and the door slammed.

Gaspard was left alone with the golden curls. Could he be sure that it was really Désirée under the coverlet? And if it were, what should he do? He had often been in queer situations before, but never one like this. In a strange house with nothing in it except a coverlet and under it a girl who was very dear to him and who had nothing on.

But the sofa gave a sudden heave as Désirée moved. The golden head turned a little and a timid, fearful, anxious little voice asked:

"Why haven't you gone?"

Debureau felt a strong desire to fall upon the golden hair like precious spoil and clasp to him all the loveliness hidden by the atrocious coverlet. But he did not dare, and only answered in a trembling voice:

"But I said I loved you, didn't I?"

Yes, he was sure of it now. Of course he loved this impressionable little girl who had tried to win him with her pretty fairy stories and had not had the courage either to go on with it or to disappoint him.

The curls were moving. To Gaspard it looked as though some modest little flower were opening. Then the face partly turned and Gaspard saw a pale forehead, lips pressed together pitifully, eyes still full of tears, and damp, tear-stained cheeks. And the pitiful mouth half-opened, and whispered with trembling faith:

"Truly? Do you truly?"

Gaspard knelt down by the sofa so that their faces were close together, and his eyes looked right down deep into hers.

"Truly," he said.

She slipped one arm round his neck and pressed him gently against her.

"Mon chéri," she whispered.

His lips found hers and he felt her tear-stained face against his own. They remained thus a long time, plunged into darkness, but with an inner radiance and light filling their eyes. Gaspard had never before known this light in darkness, this deep silence—for everything which he had called love in the past was burned up in this flameless light and not even its ashes were left.

When they drew apart, both felt as if they had wakened from a long and strange dream. They felt that they were new people and that nothing could ever spoil the beauty of the moments which they had just lived through. Désirée was not crying

any more, she was smiling; and Gaspard was not timid, he fondled her hands ardently and drank in happily the scent of her hair.

"Why do you love me?" she asked him. "Why not Annette? She's ever so much nicer and prettier and cleverer—"

"No. I like you just as you are."

"Even when I told lies?"

"You can tell them again," smiled Gaspard and thought for a moment. "Perhaps it's because I tell lies of a sort on the stage—I don't see anything wrong in it. And your lies were only dreams of happiness, that was all."

"I don't have such ugly dreams any more," Désirée whispered as softly as a bud unfolding on a twig, "because I have happy ones now. I hope they'll last for always."

"Yes," he answered, but after a moment he said: "No! We mustn't only dream, we must live!"

"How?"

"The first thing we'll do," smiled Gaspard, "is to get your shoes back from the pawnbroker."

"Oh, but I don't want you to do that," protested Désirée unhappily. "It would look like asking you to help us."

"Ma chérie, I'm so poor at present that I can't help you. But you need your shoes—so that we can go out together every day, and not only every other . . ."

"That's true, although—" she stopped short. "You don't like this room?"

"I do. Very much."

"D'you know what?" she smiled. "I'd rather you paid the rent that's owing. I don't need shoes to love you with if you come here to see me!"

"Tu as raison! Merci!" cried Gaspard and hugged her to him as hard as he could.

The old sofa certainly never thought it would be honored with the great and lovely happiness of two young people as it was that evening when Gaspard convinced himself that Désirée was not lying when she invited him so charmingly in words worthy to be made the refrain of one of Béranger's songs:

". . . I don't need shoes to love you with . . ."

The next few days and weeks were one long chain of happiness for Gaspard. They were simple, modest happinesses, of the kind which could be procured for a few sous, saved from his dinner. But they were enough for two young hearts in love. It

was love with which Gaspard glowed and in which Désirée basked. She loved him. But she loved him because he loved her. She reflected his feeling as the moon reflects the light of the sun. Gaspard did not care. He was happy to be able to love, he needed to. He needed his own love more than hers. He made it part of his work. It was a moral support and a stimulus. He wanted to work more, to earn more. At all costs he wanted to make his way. And Désirée did not cause him pain; she returned his love with tenderness and ardor. Gaspard soon was quite at home in her room. He was good friends with Annette and got to know the sergeant who was her lover. And all four of them together (or else two by two) would have wonderful and jolly times in the poor little house near the Luxembourg Garden and its acacias.

Once—it was in winter, when Gaspard had taken his monthly allowance for the fifth time from the hand of Maître Gérard—Gaspard ventured to invite Désirée to his theater. It was an unusual performance for him, knowing that beloved eyes were watching him and sensing the delicate, well-known face down there below the stage.

It was the evening, when, for the first time, a bunch of violets was brought to his dressing room.

But it did not go off very well. Little Désirée was still weak from a recent chill, and before the end of the first act Gaspard, who had not taken his eyes off her, even when he was hidden in the wings, saw her turn pale and close her eyes. He was terribly alarmed. He turned pale beneath his white make-up and sent someone at once to help her out of the auditorium. He waited for her in a passage behind the scenes. She was feeling very poorly. Instead of the word of praise or appreciation to which Gaspard had been looking forward for four months, he had to content himself with complaints about the smell in the theater, her aching head, and a tedious play. He was afraid that Désirée was going to faint.

"I want to go home!" she kept repeating.

"I can't leave," he told her.

"Take me home!" she demanded obstinately, like a sick child. She could not understand his explanations. In a flash he made up his mind, slipped a pair of ordinary trousers over his white ones, flung a dark cloak over his tunic, pulled off his hat, and took Désirée by the arm. Two of the actors who saw him stood as if stunned; they did not dare to tell the manager. The act was just ending and the intermission about to begin. The audience

clamored in vain for Pierrot. Only Harlequin and Columbine answered the applause.

"De—bu—reau!" Gaspard heard the chorus as he left the theater with Désirée. It was raining and the streets were muddy. He flung his right arm round her so that his cloak protected her from the rain, and still supporting her with his left arm, he guided her homewards with hurrying steps.

"You're so good to me, Gaspard, you're so good to me!" Désirée kept repeating as if in a dream.

"I'm anxious about you," Gaspard comforted her.

"I'm sorry about this."

"There's no need, *ma chérie*."

He was calculating in his head how far they would have got on the stage. The scene would be changed by now, the cries of the vendors of sweets and cakes in the auditorium would be dying away, the actors going slowly onto the stage. Fortunately he was not on to begin with. He had to come on with Columbine a good bit after the curtain had gone up—perhaps he would do it yet—

He held his cloak round Désirée and the rain ran down his neck. The mud splashed them, he could feel it up to his knees. What a sight his white trousers would be!

He tried to avoid all the puddles with Désirée, but the nearer they got to her home, the more he made her hurry. When they reached it he unlocked the door and he carried her upstairs. Annette was at home. Gaspard knocked and handed over his fainting sweetheart to her, and without a word turned and hurried back. Rain, puddles, mud.

The curtain had gone up. Cassandra was playing with Harlequin. Their scene ended, now Pierrot had to bring in Columbine. But no one came on. Cassandra and Harlequin began their last scene over again and prepared once more for Pierrot's entrance. Bertrand was behind the scenes; he hurried to Gaspard's dressing room—it was empty. He hurried back to the stage where Cassandra and Harlequin were going through their scene for the third time. Columbine was trembling in the wings.

Suddenly Pierrot appeared. He had taken off his dark trousers in the passage and flung some white powder on his face. He took Columbine by the hand and hurried onto the stage with her, just in time to prevent the curtain being lowered. His hair was drenched with rain, his white trousers were stained with mud up to the knees. Rivulets of water ran down his face among the powder.

He dragged Columbine across to Cassandra and handed her over to him. He was staggering with exhaustion and panting fit to burst his lungs. A few of the audience began to laugh. Others joined in. Soon the whole theater was laughing.

Gaspard knew what he looked like, but he was as calm as at any other time and just went on acting. With an abrupt turn of the head he splashed first Cassandra and then Harlequin. While the two indignant actors continued their scene with Columbine, Gaspard went behind. He took off his hat and squeezed the water out of his hair into it. Then he began using his hat for byplay. He pretended that it was torn, so he stopped up the hole. The water ran out somewhere else. He kept on thinking of more and more jokes. The audience lost interest in the story of the play and simply watched him. They laughed and applauded. Debureau had scored another success. He did not stop his improvisation till he was perfectly sure of himself. Then and then only did he take up his part in the play again.

■

## IX

### A STAR RISES

THE performance ended. The real trial was coming now. Gaspard wished the audience would go on clapping forever so that he need not leave the stage and face the thunderstorm of Bertrand's anger. But there was no escape. He was here already.

"D'you know what you've done?" Bertrand was hoarse with anger.

"No one noticed anything," Gaspard's voice trembled. "My petite amie was taken ill."

"What do I care? D'you know what this means?"

Gaspard held his breath. Surely he was not going to get the sack now, when he so badly needed to earn money and become an artist?

But the situation changed unexpectedly.

From somewhere backstage Félix appeared and beside him a tall gentleman with black hair and more elegant clothes than had ever been seen before at the Funambules. High white stocks like that were only worn at the Café Prokop. Félix gesticulated and then took the manager by the arm.

"Bertrand! You didn't know what a distinguished visitor we had at the theater today? Do you know who this is?"

Bertrand turned from Gaspard, wondering in vain what name to say.

"This is Monsieur Charles Nodier."

"Monsieur Nodier," said Bertrand respectfully with a deep bow. "I was not told, Monsieur . . ."

"N'importe. My friend Picard told me to come."

Debureau, who had just been thinking of slinking away, pricked up his ears now. Picard! One of his comrades.

"And may I ask you, Maître, whether you were pleased?" asked Bertrand with a bow.

"Pleased! I can't tell you how delighted I was!"

"Our Félix . . ." Bertrand was beginning, but Monsieur Nodier had just become sufficiently used to the gloom behind the scenes to recognize Pierrot standing behind Bertrand.

"That's my man!" he cried, and pushing Bertrand out of his way, he went up to Gaspard. "Who are you, mon cher? And how do you manage it?"

"What?" asked Gaspard awkwardly, surprised by such liveliness and such a direct attack.

"Your art! Croyez-moi, mon cher, to watch you is a delight. I shall send Picard a present tomorrow for his advice!"

Bertrand and Félix exchanged a few helpless glances. And Gaspard was trying with all his might to remember in what connection he had heard Nodier's name. "Nodier, cet amateur de génie. . . ." Someone had said that. Was it Bouquet? Was it Gérard? Certainly it was in connection with the romantic movement.

"D'you know," he turned to Bertrand again, "I've never in my life had an abonnement at a theater for a whole season—because no theater has ever seemed to me worth it. But I'm going to make an exception now. I'm going to take a loge. Every Saturday evening. I'll bring all my friends here!"

"What an honor, Maître," stammered Bertrand and turned to look for Félix. But Félix had gone.

"I know Félix. C'est un acteur solide," said Nodier. "But this fellow simply enchanted me. What's your name?"

"Debureau."

"An odd name. I shan't remember it. But I shall remember your acting, mon cher, and you too. D'you know what I'm doing now?"

"No."

"I'm writing the history of Punchinello! D'you know what that means? No, hein? It means that you are its completion! Who suggested this costume to you? This narrow tunic, these frills, this mask? I must have a talk with you! You must come to see me." And turning again to Bertrand: "Monsieur Bertrand, you are a discoverer—and you've had devilish good luck. What's the fellow's name? Debureau? No, I shan't be able to remember it, but it'll come back to me on Saturday. Here's my card. Send me the bill for the abonnement. Good evening. And you, Pierrot, come and see me. Any morning. I want to ask you about all sorts of things. Au revoir."

He vanished as abruptly as a storm that rages over the mountains and suddenly drops. The whole backstage world still seemed to vibrate with his energy and shine with the reflected glow of a great personality who had honored it with a visit.



And now Bertrand and Debureau stood facing each other once more, but the situation had changed.

"What was I going to say?" grunted Bertrand.

"You were just going to give me the sack," replied Gaspard, not seizing the opportunity to profit by the triumph which chance had flung in his way. "But it would have been very unfair of you," he went on simply. "My fiancée was taken ill and I had to take her home. I was sorry about it, but I got back in time and everything was all right."

"H'm." Bertrand nodded. "All right. You're lucky. I'll give you four sous extra every Saturday."

"Oh, merci!" Gaspard's eyes shone. He did not know that he could have demanded ten times as much, and that anyone else would have done so in his place.

Happy that the evening which had been so troubled had turned out all right, he hurried to his dressing room and changed. He wiped the paint and powder quickly from his face and flung on his clothes. His muddy trousers reminded him of Désirée and he hurried.

Suddenly he realized that someone was standing behind him. He looked round. It was Félix, already dressed. Gaspard stood up politely.

"Yes, Monsieur? You aren't cross with me for being late for my entrance?"

"No," said Félix gloomily, and Gaspard understood that the matter was important. He stood and looked his teacher and rival straight in the face.

"I've come, Debureau, to talk about my—late exit."

Late entrance—late exit! Gaspard did not know what it was all about. And he was confused to notice that Félix was using the formal *vous* instead of the familiar *tu*.

"But you took your exit in time, Monsieur Félix?"

"Do you think so?" Félix smiled sadly. "Let's hope the others think so, too. I'm leaving the *Funambules*."

"No!" Gaspard was startled. "Because of me? Bertrand will sack me for it."

"No, Debureau. I want to go in time, before he sacks *me*."

The sensitive Gaspard was almost in tears at this. Was he to be the reason for the great Félix, who, with all his enviousness and jealousy, was one of the founders of his happiness, to have to clear out of the theater in which he had acted so long?

"No, no!" he cried. "I'd sooner go myself!"

"You're such a generous fool, Debureau, I believe you'd really do it. But it would be no good—because I—I'm not doing it from generosity. I'm going because I must."

"Why can't we both go on playing here?"

"The theater doesn't need us both, and the audience prefers you."

"But you're wrong, Félix . . ." Gaspard burst out.

"Not a bit. You must feel it yourself. And I don't want to be second here."

"But Bertrand . . ."

"You'll see. He'll agree. He'll manage with you; he needs you more than me. It would be stupid to try to change things. And now—don't look at me as if it were all up with me. Frédéric left and made a success elsewhere. I shall do the same. I may not become as great as Frédéric, but I shall try."

"Mon cher Félix . . ."

"Brr, not that tone of voice! We're still on the stage: a cuff and a somersault, and there you are! Come along to Bertrand."

"Must I?"

"I want to see your affairs put straight."

Debureau obediently followed Félix, just as he was, half-dressed and with make-up still on his face.

"I'm leaving," said Félix.

"Bonne chance," said Bertrand. "I've just given Laurent your part."

"You see how simple it is, Debureau?" smiled Félix. "But there's still something to fix up."

"What's that?"

"The contract for Gaspard Debureau. As long as I've been here I've had a nasty impression that his contract was about as bad as it could be. I can at least see that he gets a decent one, now I'm going."

"You're right there, too," said Bertrand gratefully. "Gaspard deserves a written contract."

"I'm glad you recognize that," said Félix. "How much are you getting, Debureau?"

"Nine francs a week."

"How much d'you want?"

"I did have eighteen."

"Then I'll give him twenty," said Bertrand quickly.

"No, you won't. You'll give him thirty—no, thirty-five francs a week—and if you don't I'll take him with me and see that he gets an engagement somewhere else."

"Thirty-five?" Bertrand threw up his hands and Gaspard did the same in spirit.

"It's little enough," admitted Félix, "but perhaps Gaspard will be content with it as a beginning." And he added meaningly to Bertrand: "You know what it means that Nodier's pleased? You know very well the sort of people Debureau brings here! And if Nodier's pleased it means Debureau is a real artist—and your own blindness is to blame for insisting on preferring me to him. Sit down and write the contract!"

"You're an amazingly good fellow, Félix," whispered Gaspard. "No salary in the world will ever mean more to me than what you've given me today. I wouldn't have believed anyone could be so good."

"There's a lot of goodness, Gaspard, that we don't know of because it's hidden in the human heart," grunted Félix philosophically.

"I know, Félix." Gaspard swallowed his emotion. "But no one would ever think it of you."

"Thanks for the parting bit of frankness, Debureau, you're right. I may not become a great actor. But perhaps history will record in my favor that at least I knew when to go. Good-by, Debureau, and bring fame to the Funambules!"

When he went out it was as if someone had died.

"Come, Debureau," said Bertrand, "let's make a contract about how you're to bring fame to the Funambules!"

"Oui, Monsieur Bertrand."

Two days later, Monsieur Gérard received the following letter:

"DEAR AND HONORED SIR,

"Permit me to inform you that the happy time has come when I can tell you that I no longer need your generous support. I have attained my ends. The public loves me and Monsieur Bertrand has decided to make a permanent contract with me which guarantees me 35 francs (thirty-five francs) weekly salary. I am very glad that I shall now be independent. I hope, however, that you will not withdraw your kind favor from me and that you will honor our theater now and then with your distinguished presence. I look forward to

the time when I shall be able to repay all the kindness which you have done me and remain, with deepest gratitude,

"Yours faithfully,

"JEAN GASPARD DEBUREAU.

"Given in Paris 12th December, 1828.

"P.S. That you may believe my news I attach a copy of the contract which I have signed. Please return it to me at your convenience. J. G. D."

The form of the letter had worried him a little, but its tone showed clearly enough his uprightness, devotion and gratitude.

The contract was enclosed in the letter :

Théâtre des FUNAMBULES.

Engagement.

Between the undersigned M. Nicolas Michel BERTRAND, manager of the Théâtre des Funambules, residing in Paris, Bd. du Temple, No. 18, on the one hand ;

and M. Jean Gaspard DEBUREAU, pantomime artist, residing in Paris, Faubourg du Temple, No. 28, on the other hand. It has been agreed as follows, viz :

I, BERTRAND, engage M. Debureau under this contract to play the part of Pierrot in my company, and any other parts given to him by myself or the régisseur. This engagement is made with the following reservations and restrictions, viz :

- 1 I, Jean Gaspard DEBUREAU bind myself to play all the roles assigned to me by the manager or the producer, to dance and take part in ballets, processions, pantomimes and all other shows ; to take part with the company in all extraordinary performances even when given outside the theater.
- 2 I promise to take part in general and partial rehearsals, to come to the theater on Sundays at three and on other days at four, for the purpose of exercising my art in the performances arranged by the manager ; further, to pay the stipulated fines, with which I am acquainted, without protest.
- 3 I accept all existing regulations and am satisfied with the lighting, heating and costumes assigned to me by the management.
- 4 I will not absent myself from Paris without the written permission of the management, and will present myself at the theater every day, even when I am not acting, to enable the management to change the program without warning if necessary.
- 5 In the case of illness the management has the right to suspend the payment of artists until their return.
- 6 In the case of fire, closure of the theater by the authorities, or other case of force majeure, this agreement ceases immediately to be active, without any obligation on the part of the management.

- 7 The actor binds himself to provide the linen suitable to his costume, also stockings, shoes, gloves and rouge. The management provides the costumes and properties. In the case of rope dancing, the actor provides everything necessary for this purpose.
- 8 In the case of drunkenness, a fine will be imposed upon the actor; if it is repeated, the management has the right to cancel the contract.
- 9 I bind myself, under pain of a fine of 300 francs, not to appear at any other theater without the permission of my own management.

Under these conditions M. BERTRAND binds himself to pay to M. DEBEREAU the sum of 35 francs weekly for the period of this agreement, which is made for the space of three years.

Agreed, made and given out in duplicate between ourselves and signed in Paris on the 10th day of December, 1828.

BERTRAND.

It is not known exactly what was the impression made upon Gérard by this interesting enclosure. But he certainly spoke about it to Nodier, who welcomed Gaspard, when he came to see him one morning about three days later, with the words:

"How did you come to make that contract, Monsieur Debureau?"

"I had luck. The things you said about my acting helped." Gaspard smiled self-consciously.

"Luck? I don't know what agreements they make between the convicts and the State authorities, but I think they're very much better than those conditions of yours."

"They seemed to me all right—the conditions," said Debureau anxiously.

"What? Here's your contract. Maître Gérard gave it to me. It's the most ridiculous piece of writing I've ever cast eyes on. Here's the first snag— How can you agree to act whatever part they give you? You are Pierrot, et baste! You're not going to play Harlequin or the clown?"

"I think they'll let me play Pierrot," said Gaspard timidly.

"I should think so. Very well, we'll pass the first snag— Tell me, what are these fines of yours."

"I've got the list here," said Debureau, and pulled a crumpled paper from his pocket.

Nodier raised his lorgnon and read:

"For missing a rehearsal, one to six francs. For missing the dress rehearsal the fine is doubled. For missing a performance,

one to twelve francs. For drunkenness one to six francs. For quarreling and fighting in the theater one to twelve francs. For causing confusion during the play two francs—" He began to laugh. "What genius drew up this discriminating tariff? I should love to see your manager assessing the degree of drunkenness so as to know whether to impose a fine of one franc or six! And what if you're drunk a whole week? Will you go on paying the manager as long as your wages last?"

"Well, I haven't got anything."

"That's all one. It's like that in your contract. Let's go on. Go to the theater every day. *Au diable!* But this—*c'est d'une mesquinerie incroyable!* If you're ill, won't the management pay you anything?"

"But I shan't be acting if I'm ill," Gaspard excused this clause of the contract.

"And are you to die of hunger? Just at the time when you need money most, they won't give you anything. I know a fair number of theaters and actors and their contracts, but I've never read anything aussi satanique que ça!"

"It's much better than I had before."

"No. We can't leave it like this. I'm coming with you to the theater—and we shall see."

"Ah, Monsieur, don't spoil my good fortune! The manager will change his mind and not give me anything!"

"You are too modest, Monsieur Debureau, because you don't realize what is in you. I have not much time to convince you, but I'm not leaving the matter like this. I shall come to the theater this evening. I wanted to see you again anyway."

Debureau was really afraid that the generous and illustrious Monsieur Nodier would spoil this undreamed-of good fortune. What Nodier had said weighed on his mind. As soon as he left the house he hurried to Désirée; he had supper with the two girls and then went on to the theater. He was late and reached the Funambules perspiring and tired. He went to his dressing room; it struck cold and damp here more than outside. Now he noticed his surroundings with the eyes of the best paid actor of the Funambules, and not at all as an actor who was paid a few sous for charity. The walls were damp. Over the mirror and in all the corners, even by the tiny stove, ugly green stains stole down to the ground. Fancy his never noticing that before! When he looked closer he saw that the whole wall was covered with yel-

lowish drops. The cold struck into his very bones. He remembered Nodier's reproaches and resolved to go to Bertrand.

"Monsieur Bertrand, my dressing room's an absolute cellar. It's damp and cold. Could you give me another?"

"All right, we'll shove Laurent in there."

"No, that won't make it any better. I'd rather you had it cleaned up and repaired. And please give me a proper stove there."

"Gaspard, you're raving."

"I can put up with it in the summer. But in winter it simply won't do. I know you're surprised at my daring to ask. I'm really ashamed of myself for coming now I've got a contract—"

"As soon as you've got it—" Bertrand cut in.

"But you haven't studied it. Don't you know what Clause Three lays down? You needn't look it up—I'll tell you. 'Satisfied with the lighting and heating supplied by the management.' That's what it says."

"That means that if you don't have the place heated at all and I get bronchitis—"

"Monsieur Debureau, I see that we are getting on bad terms because you obviously want to make extortionate demands."

"No, Monsieur Bertrand," said Gaspard anxiously, "not a bit. I just thought that if this matter could be settled there'd be nothing at all for me to complain about, and everything would be quite fair and square between us."

"Fair and square, Monsieur Debureau, is what is according to your agreement. I shall carry out my obligations, please carry out yours."

"Which means?"

"That you will be satisfied with the lighting and heating supplied by the management."

"I knew all along I should lose the toss," said Gaspard, shaking his head.

"Someone's been putting you against me, haven't they?"

"Not exactly that. They merely pointed out some deficiencies in the contract."

"Who was that?"

"I!" said Charles Nodier, striding into the office. "Good evening, Bertrand."

"Deeply honored by your visit, Maître," said Bertrand with a bow.

"Honored, perhaps, but not exactly pleased," smiled Nodier. "My article on your Pierrot comes out in *Le Mercure* tomorrow."

I've an idea, in fact I'm quite sure, it's the first thing that's ever been written about your little theater. And I'm of opinion that you'll revise this poor fellow's contract."

But Bertrand was of the stuff of which heroes are made.

"Monsieur Nodier, I greatly esteem your valuable opinion, but a contract is a contract and we must abide by its stipulations."

"All right," said Nodier quietly. "Monsieur Debureau—why, there! I know your name after all!—let's go to your dressing room. You'll allow us, won't you, Monsieur Bertrand?"

"Certainly, Maître. Nothing like that's forbidden by the regulations."

"I bow to your regulations." He took Debureau by the arm and led him away.

"I shouldn't have done it," Gaspard shook his head sadly.

"Just you wait, you old silly. We'll teach the obstinate old devil a lesson. You're going to prosecute him."

"Never, Monsieur!" cried Gaspard, terrified.

"I know you're a hermit, but one day you'll have to get over your repugnance to the world and its laws and institutions. I don't want to humiliate you by offering you charity. You're going to do without wine with your dinner for a couple of days and visit a lawyer. You're going to bring a case against your manager to compel him to do up your dressing room."

"He'll certainly give me the sack."

"In the first place he can't, under your contract, and in the second place, I repeat, he'll beg you to stay. He's simply got to learn that you're not dependent on him."

"But I love this theater so—I couldn't live without it."

They entered the dressing room.

"So this is your dressing room? It's appalling. I'd have said it was a wild beast's cage or a cell for a dangerous criminal."

"I'm afraid of catching cold here," admitted Gaspard. "I was afraid to speak about it before. Who knows if I haven't got rheumatism?"

"Not only rheumatism of the body," said Nodier, who looked, in his elegant clothes, rather like a rose on a dung heap, "but rheumatism of the soul. I don't think you can stay here even a minute."

"It's chiefly when I come off the stage," explained Gaspard. "I'm all damp and perspiring and I simply shiver with cold."

"Nom de Dieu!" cried Nodier. "Have you ever looked behind that cupboard?"



"No."

"Help me pull it out."

"But you'll get all dusty, Monsieur Nodier!"

"Help me."

The cupboard moved. The wall behind it was saturated with moisture. The wooden flooring was quite rotten there, and a few blackish-purple toadstools were growing in a pile of dirt and cobwebs.

"Are you growing mushrooms here, Debureau?" asked Nodier.

"It's awful," Gaspard had to admit. The toadstools had a crusty, mildewed surface. Dirt and damp breathed from them. They were so repulsive that one could hardly look at them.

"That will be an excellent piece of evidence," smiled Nodier, carefully poking the fungi with his cane. "Don't say a word to anybody, Debureau. Just think of the judge in all his glory—how his eyes will flash when this *corpus delicti* is placed on the table before him. Upon my soul, I'm looking forward to the case."

"But I don't want to bring a case, Monsieur Nodier." Debureau stuck doggedly to his point.

"Now listen to what I tell you, Gaspard Debureau," said Nodier gravely, leaving the toadstools and going up to him. "You're going to bring this case because you owe it to the whole world to keep your health and strength. Besides, don't you know Paris? Don't you know it needs a sensation to make Paris enthusiastic? Remember what I tell you: it may be that this purple fungus will lay the foundations of your glory."

"Do you really think so?"

"I adjure you in the name of everything that you love now and will love in the future. And if you don't do as I say, I swear I'll never let your name be spoken in my presence again. Now get dressed. And act as you did yesterday, I beg you. I have a few friends here who want to see you."

"I'll do my best, Monsieur."

"Death to Clause Three!" said Nodier in farewell.

"Death to Clause Three," Gaspard forced himself to repeat.

## X

### HAPPINESS AND GENEROSITY

GASPARD rose in fame.

The loges at the Funambules were filled more and more often with elegantly dressed spectators, to the astonishment of the stage and the parterre. Nodier did not come any more; ever since he had become an abonné his place had been empty; but he clearly was not silent about his discovery, and his friends and acquaintances came. His article was not published; it was the same story as with Bouquet's picture. But Debureau was accustomed now to disappointed hopes. He accepted it like a buffet on the stage and did not even smile.

And just as on the stage Pierrot trod on the prostrate Cassandra, so in real life he dealt unconscious wounds. The sufferings of the unfortunate lady in the charcuterie opposite the theater lasted almost a year. Even Coquette was attached to her. Gaspard gave Coquette to Désirée to cheer her up in the intervals of her tedious work. But ill luck befell Coquette; either she was not kept watch on or (but what a comparison!) she learned frivolity from her new mistress. In short, it became obvious that Coquette was going to have puppies. Both the girls lavished every kind of care and attention upon her, and when the happy event was successfully over, Mademoiselle Lavaux from the charcuterie had her share in the rejoicings. She received a puppy through the intermediary of the old ouvreuse at the theater. It was a wedding present, which Gaspard unwittingly gave her; for three days later she married a rich butcher from the quartier de la Bastille. It was a marriage of despair. Her husband, of course, did not know that. And there was one thing he could not understand: Why did his wife beg him so eloquently not to keep a mastiff, like all the other butchers in the neighborhood? And why did she make him have instead the little puppy, which never would grow up into anything much? His neighbors abused him for an aristocrat and an arriviste; but his wife was adamant. So he bore it, and was rewarded with her devoted love.

Perhaps Debureau would have been happier with her than

with Désirée. But men who are accustomed to keep staring at the horizon and whom life has taught that they never get anything without great and painful efforts, do not see the things that are offered them. It is not in their nature to believe in them. They would consider such a thing unnatural or a trap.

Debureau first received a bunch of flowers on the rainy night when Désirée visited the theater and he took her home; that was the night of his meeting with Nodier. Gaspard never doubted for a second that his sweetheart had sent them to him. He did not speak to her about it, but he was very tender to her. The little bunch of violets appeared in his dressing room about three times more. And Gaspard always bowed very significantly to all the ladies in the loges to show—he did not know to which of them—his gratitude for the gift.

Nodier, the magnificent Nodier, whose visit was looked back upon by everyone at the Funambules as an evening of brightest glory, was right about the case as well. It may have been a fact or Gaspard may only have dreamed it, but he began to have pains all over his body. The purplish fungi, the reeking walls and floor, upset him as if they had been ferocious enemies. "The Godets" he called them once in a rage, remembering the scoundrel who had had his father imprisoned and was to blame for his death. The fungi tormented him even in his dreams. He said so to the quill driver who took down his statement in the case. And in the presence of the judge Gaspard uncovered a basket and placed the largest of the fungi on the table. Yes, Nodier was right. Judges had been less horrified at the skulls of murdered men. There was a sensation in court. The judge instructed Bertrand to pull up the toadstools and Gaspard to abide by his agreement. But the important thing was that the newspaper men got hold of it, first one and then the others. Almost all the newspapers printed the story of the interesting case in which a toadstool like a cat's head had made its appearance on the judge's table. The effect was felt most advantageously at the Funambules. It was booked up for the whole of the following week. Everyone wanted to see the actor who had to make up in a dressing room with toadstools growing in it, and who had prosecuted his manager on that account.

Gaspard imagined that Bertrand would seize the first opportunity of showing him the door or at least to impose a heavy fine on him. He behaved as well as he possibly could; even on the stage he was a model of conscientiousness and did not venture on a single improvisation. Except once, and then he was compelled to.

It was when the old actor, Charles, who acted the drunken clown and always accompanied Cassandra, got really drunk, and appearing in the first scene with all his properties in his hands, handed them over to Pierrot and announced quietly to the audience that he was going home to have a sleep and was damned if he was going to act. It was a desperate situation. Bertrand's hair stood up on end and he could not even whisper to the curtain hand to prevent the scandal. Whispers broke out among the audience which was beginning to grasp what had happened. It would have ended with hissing and catcalls which would have been the talk of the whole faubourg for half a year.

But Debureau was there, with his motionless, sensitive face. He simply raised his eyebrows, and the well-known smile of comprehension played round his lips. He put the properties down in front of him and considered a moment with his hand on his forehead—and the spectators were quiet again, seeing his calmness and uncertain whether it was not all a pre-arranged piece of business—they had decided for the play to continue. Ah, yes! Now he has an idea. He will act two characters at once! He looks for Charles for a little while. He looks for him even among the spectators. He examines a bearded glover to see if he is not Charles in disguise. The audience is laughing again, but at Pierrot, not at the muddle on the stage. No, Charles is not here. What shall I do? I must act him myself. He takes off his hat and imitates the ancient Charles. He does it faultlessly. He hugs himself together, hangs his head, staggers a little—in a second he is Charles, only better, because he is a caricature. He expounds his plan; the audience is won over. Gaspard springs over to the other side of the stage and is Pierrot once more, tall and superior; quite another face, quite other gestures—another person. Then he is Charles again. The audience is amused by the quick changes. Gaspard increases the speed. He is not one actor but two, one of whom keeps on disappearing. Finally Charles stalks off in a dignified manner and Pierrot comes on alone. He acts his pleasure at finding himself alone—and the play is able to go on. All is saved. The remainder of the play continues as usual. Pierrot fills the vacant place of Charles when necessary. Everything is fine, only Charles has a fine of twelve francs to pay.

After the performance Bertrand sent for Gaspard. Gaspard knew that he had saved the situation, but he was alarmed none the less. From the moment when they had left the judge's presence he had not spoken to Bertrand. There was a barrel of gunpowder be-

tween them, which might explode at any moment—and it was not hard to guess which of them would be most badly damaged. He approached the manager uncertainly and in alarm.

"Debureau," said Bertrand severely and rose from his table. "It is always an unpleasant thing to have to confess that one has got the worst of it. But I take it on myself. I have got the worst of this quarrel with you."

Gaspard was still waiting to hear what was coming. He was surprised that nothing was said about the present occasion. Bertrand continued in a tone which convinced him that he was not going to speak of it, but its effect was visible in every word.

"Taking the case into court," and Bertrand smiled hypocritically, "was an excellent idea, Debureau. We must think of something like that more often. Sit down."

Gaspard waited.

"You will certainly have noticed that I had your dressing room cleaned and disinfected?" Gaspard nodded. "This coming Easter we're closing the theater. Do you know why? We're going to make it bigger and better. I've decided to have la vieille boîte rebuilt and redecorated."

"The whole theater?" asked Gaspard, astonished.

"The auditorium. I'm having a new gallery. I'll have the boxes redecorated. It shall be a theater that even Monsieur Nodier need not be ashamed to enter."

Gaspard had already begun to hope that the thing would turn out all right and not have any evil consequences. But he had not dared to hope for such a complete revolution.

"Look here, Debureau," said Bertrand, "I can't raise your pay—but are you interested in weapons?"

"I don't know anything about using them. I haven't been a soldier," said Gaspard respectfully.

"No, no! I meant our weapons in the property room. You like to take a sword or a saber in your hand, don't you? It's what they call romantic."

"Why, yes," admitted Gaspard to encourage Bertrand to go on.

"I should like to put these things in your charge. Have a look at them now and then, see that everything is put back after a performance—and that's about all. You will have the inventory to go by, and you'll put it back afterwards."

"Who's been doing it up to now?"

"Madame Carpon."

"And shan't you cut down her wages?"

"No," admitted Bertrand grudgingly.

"All right, then I'll do it."

"Here's the supplement to the contract." Bertrand handed him a paper, and Debureau saw with astonishment that for looking after the armory the management of the theater was going to pay him another ten francs a week.

"No!" he shouted.

"Yes," answered Bertrand in a self-satisfied manner, feasting on his joyful excitement.

"Then I shall have—" Gaspard calculated with his eyes full of happiness, and even this easy sum gave him a lot of work.

"Certainly."

"But then—then I shall be able—"

"What will you be able to do?"

"To get married!" And Gaspard forgot that Bertrand was the unapproachable manager. "You see, Monsieur Bertrand, I've been looking forward to it for a long time, and now at last I shall have enough to be able to give Désirée what she needs. Ah, Monsieur Bertrand, you can ask what you will of me, because nothing can compare with the marvelous feeling that I can go to Désirée and say to her— Ah, Monsieur Bertrand, forgive me, but you're such a splendid fellow!"

"You can embrace me if you like," laughed Bertrand. "Have you been thinking me the meanest scoundrel in the world?"

"Not quite," said Gaspard truthfully, "but you haven't been the best of all possible managers. But you've made up for everything now. I'll be faithful to you and the Funambules till death. And I'll act, I'll act— Do you know, Monsieur Bertrand, I really needed a little of this happiness."

"Mon Dieu, just for this couple of francs." Bertrand was almost ashamed.

"Mais non, it isn't the money, not a bit." Gaspard crossed himself. "It's the life. I'm old enough to have a wife. You know, a little home—a table, a cupboard, a bed, a stove, and in the midst of it all a wife, my own wife!"

"As if you were in love for the first time."

"No. Not quite. But I've always longed for a wife and home—someone who will love me and be faithful to me."

"Bien," said Bertrand, smiling unsteadily. "Run along and get married, Debureau!"

"You think such happiness is not possible?" Gaspard could see that he had some hidden thought.

"Just you run off and see." Bertrand waved his hand and his mouth curved into a smile. "You'll be able to get away somewhere for a honeymoon."

"Not really?"

"When we're doing up the theater you shall have a week's leave. That's time enough for all sorts of things."

"I'm off, Monsieur Bertrand, and once more—thanks!"

He was gone.

"Happiness clouds folks' understanding," grunted Bertrand, putting away the contract.

The girl who has shared her love with me shall be my wife. That was what Gaspard had always said, and he said it tonight. He did not usually go to see Désirée after performances but tonight, tonight he must go. Perhaps he might just catch her before she went to sleep and be able to talk to her about this new happiness and the miraculous possibilities which had suddenly appeared above the surface of his life. He did think of going to find Christophe and Adolphe, too, taking a bottle of good wine for each and having a jolly evening with them, but he could do that tomorrow, and that would give him time to buy a piece of lace or some new shoes for the good-hearted Justine. But tonight he must go to Désirée.

While he was still a long way off he could see a light in her window. How should he catch her attention? He tried whistling. Then he threw up a little stone. But no one opened the window or came and looked out. Presently the light moved and grew less. Someone had taken the candle away. Perhaps Annette had a visitor and was seeing him down to the front door. Yes, there were steps on the stairs; they were coming down. Dieu soit loué, he would be able to speak to Désirée tonight.

He moved away quietly so as not to disturb them. A key grated in the lock. A man's figure came slowly and carefully out of the house, and a girl's head showed behind him, but the light was behind her, and Gaspard could not distinguish who it was. He saw the man take her in his arms and kiss her again. Yes, it must be Annette with her sergeant, or with someone else, it did not matter to him. One more moment of sweet whispering—one more embrace and one more kiss—and the man turned and strode

swiftly away. The girl stared after him for a moment, then drew back her hand with the light in it, and began to shut the door.

Gaspard jumped up and ran to the door, catching at the latch.

"Annette!" He pushed open the door. The light was swaying like a little boat which has suddenly been caught by a great ocean wave.

It was Désirée. The light quivered on her face like a shining tear.

Désirée was almost fainting. She waited for Gaspard to strike her, to knock her down and go.

But the Pierrot of the Funambules was incarnate in Gaspard Debureau. The first thing he did was to take the candle out of her trembling hand, and the light shone out again clear and unwavering.

"Are you alone?" She nodded. "Then let's go up."

He took her gently by the arm. The staircase accompanied them with its dark walls. And beside Gaspard walked someone else, his soul, who was saying to him: The happiness you have won is only pain. Humiliate yourself, sacrifice this moment, forgive, and you will gain far more—your whole life. Don't let things go wrong at the first mistake—

They reached the little room. Gaspard put down the candle. Désirée sat on the old familiar sofa as if turned to stone, staring motionless before her. Only her shoulders and breast quivered, as a prelude to sobs.

"I don't want to ask you anything, Désirée," said Gaspard in a calm, cool voice.

A gleam of gratitude crossed her face and the thought shot through Gaspard: You're going the right way, old man, you'll win through.

"Why did you spy on me?" whispered Désirée.

"You feel you've done wrong so you're looking for a fault in me, too. But I didn't come for that, Désirée. I came to tell you that my salary's been raised, so that now I've got enough—to marry you."

Désirée did not know whether he was joking or even jeering at her. She gave one miserable look at Gaspard's face and then stared elsewhere.

"And now you've caught me," she hardened her voice, "and you've a fine chance to show me how I've spoiled my happiness. Shall I clap?"

"You're just making yourself miserable," Gaspard smiled



kindly, "my intentions haven't changed at all. I love you, Désirée. I know I'm not telling it you very glowingly or ardently. I'm just saying it simply and ordinarily, because I want to live with you. I'm longing for it, and that's the truth—just as if I'd said it's night. Because they're both equally true and unalterable."

She listened to him, scarcely breathing. He was really talking strangely, and more convincingly than ever before.

"Perhaps you'd have liked to hear it put more romantically, and I might have managed it. But see here! I want to have you, and live with you, have a room, and a table in it and a bed, and the two of us there among it all. And flowers in the window. And so I'm asking you, Désirée, if you'll be my wife."

She still could not believe the last part. It was above her comprehension of generosity that the man who had just caught her in the act of betraying him should be offering her to share his life for always.

"And what—what about?" she tried to ask, thinking of what he had just seen.

"I believe, Désirée," and now for the first time there was a note of ardent pleading in his voice, "that this new hope of mine—this delight in our life together—will make you love me, too—and that you'll do everything you can, not to spoil our life. Will you?"

She stood up, and her eyes were very big.

"But, mon cher, what if I've been unfaithful to you more than once?"

"You won't be again."

"Suppose I'm not as good as you think I am?"

"You will be."

"Mon cher," she whispered, and went up to him. "Do you really want me? Really?"

"Oui, ma chérie," he said, and his voice trembled.

It was only then that Désirée burst into tears of shame and self-pity.

And pity for her future husband.

## XI

### MONSIEUR GODET ON THE SCENE

IT was Wednesday, six days before the wedding.

Coquette was rather weary of life, but she once more accompanied her master faithfully each evening to the theater. She had her part in his excellent spirits. If he wanted to go in for the unheard-of luxury of sending out for a bottle of wine, there was sure to be a suitable dainty for Coquette as well.

Gaspard was making himself up.

There was a sudden knock at the door, and Coquette growled.

"Good evening, Monsieur Debureau," said a man, opening the door.

"Good evening," answered Gaspard, and looked at his visitor. At first sight he did not recognize him.

"Old acquaintances, what?" smiled the man.

Gaspard recognized him now—it was Godet. Godet from the Rue St. Maur. Godet the traitor and swindler. Godet: Judas.

"Who let you come through?" said Gaspard, frowning.

"I said I was an old acquaintance of yours."

A glass of red wine was standing on the table; it reminded Gaspard of the approaching festivity and put him in a peaceful frame of mind.

"You're in luck, Monsieur Godet. All this time since I saw you last I've been hating you for the harm you did us. But today it just happens I don't want to quarrel with you. What do you want?"

"Aren't you going to offer an old friend a drop of wine?"

"Certainly—though you aren't a friend. Help yourself."

"Thanks." He drank and sat down on a chair. "Why I came? Well, I've earned my living in all sorts of ways. We've had all sorts of times, my wife and I. Now and then I've heard of you—we live not far away."

"I've never seen you."

"We've often met, but you're always wrapped up in your own thoughts and you've never recognized me. And I've been saying to myself, I'll leave him in peace. But when I heard from one

of your actor fellows how you've been getting up in the world, I said to myself: there, now, I said, it wouldn't be fair, would it, if a fellow who's got all that much didn't help an old mate. . . ."

Debureau turned away from his glass of red wine, and his face was very serious.

"Listen, Monsieur Godet. I've a thousand reasons to think badly of you. You've injured me so deeply that no one can ever make it up to me. But, because I'm very happy these days, I might manage to forget it. I have always wanted to be revenged on you, but I'll forget all that. I know you'd fallen on evil days and that you had to get a living by harming other people."

"No lectures, now, Monsieur Debureau," growled Godet. "I didn't come for that."

"You must be over forty now, Monsieur Godet, and I don't want to read you lectures. Go on living as you like. But I can only be at peace with this terrible memory if you promise me that you will never cross my path. I might even spare you a couple of francs, but I don't want to do it on principle. You killed my father, and I'm not going to pay you for murder."

Gaspard's eyes flashed and his face had flushed under his make-up. Even his voice had risen and leapt the border line between forced quiet and an outburst of anger.

"No play-acting here, Monsieur Debureau, I haven't bought a ticket," said Godet insolently. "I don't want you to give me anything. I've come to sell you a secret."

"What about?"

"Napoleon's jewels."

"How do you propose to sell it to me?"

"Tomorrow I'm going along past the police headquarters. If you and I come to an arrangement, I won't go in, see? But if we don't I'll tell them about your Bonapartist sympathies."

Gaspard's face had gone white again, but it was an unnatural white. And in the festering, throbbing wound within him Gaspard recognized the things which had the power to shake his serenity: injustice, meanness, cruelty.

"Monsieur Godet," he said in a voice which trembled as if with fever, "here are ten francs. It's all I can spare. I'm not giving it to buy your silence but your disappearance—instantly."

"Don't you think it's too little, Monsieur Debureau? Now, if you're fair . . ."

"Silence!" Debureau could hold himself in no longer. "I understand a man being a blackmailer, but to come to your own vic-

tim, to a man whose father you killed, and try your brutish ways on him is a horror that even a beast wouldn't be capable of."

"Monsieur Debureau," Godet tried to quiet him, "you must admit . . ."

"Clear out!" shouted Debureau and his hands trembled with rage.

"Look out for yourself then!" said Godet warningly.

"Clear out!" Debureau made a swift step so that he stood close beside Godet, his hand pointing to the door.

But Godet suddenly stooped down and dealt Gaspard a savage blow in the stomach. Gaspard sprang back, but Godet had hardly taken another step when Coquette, who had been lying quiet all this time, sprang at him. No one had ever taught her to defend her master, but perhaps her heroic past on the stage came to life within her. She dug her teeth into the bully's leg so that he gave a howl of pain. He caught the dog by her jaws, dragged them open, and kicked her savagely away. Poor Coquette struck the opposite wall and fell to the floor like a bundle of rags. Her howls of pain echoed through all the space behind the scenes.

Gaspard did not care what Godet was doing, he ran to his dog. But Godet was not staying now. He looked round quickly to see if there was anything he could steal, but finding nothing, he opened the door and closed it quietly behind him. He managed to vanish before anyone stopped him, for Gaspard was still kneeling beside his poor little comrade.

Coquette looked at him a few seconds longer with a heart-breaking glance, and then it was all over. Gaspard had lost his most faithful friend.

"Curtain up!" shouted the call boy. "Just beginning."

Gaspard stroked the dog's head and back gently for the last time and stood up. Once more he put on more paint and powder to hide the traces of grief. And as each time before, it seemed to him that he needed more and more make-up if he was to look merry, and less and less if he was to look sad.

"Curtain up!" came the call.

Once more he flung himself into the play as into a whirlpool, to forget the pain which was waiting for him behind the scenes.

Debureau went onto the stage. But he came back once more. He was looking for the little metal whistle which he always used when he played a dual part, and when, as the treacherous soldier,

he gave the enemy warning. Who knew if he might not need it tonight?

Then he went back to the stage.

He found it very hard at first. He could not help thinking of poor Coquette. It was he who was really to blame. He ought not to have been friendly and forgotten his revenge. But this was no place for friendliness. His revenge was a sacred duty. Coquette was lying there dead.

He was acting badly. His body felt heavy and his limbs were like lead. And in the depths of his being was a weight which allowed him to sway, but not to jump.

He summoned up all his forces. When he saw that he was failing, he put twice as much into his acting as usual. His face hardly moved, but there was twice the expression in his eyes. His body slowly yielded and let itself be mastered. He sank himself in the play as in a cleansing bath. I must shake it off, I must get rid of the filth of human wickedness! And he acted, acted— He had no thought now for the past; he was lost in the play. He was grief itself—he was laughter, jealousy, love— Even his fellow actors noticed how he was acting, and commented on it to each other. It was almost impossible to add anything to this studied perfection. It did not come from an actor but from the depths of the human soul, yearning to conjure up a better and fairer world, not only for the audience, but for itself as well.

Things went all right until the scene where Pierrot chases Harlequin's head in the inn kitchen. Just as Pierrot hurried from the pot to the dresser and saw the head of the real Harlequin, when the audience was at the height of its merriment, something unheard-of happened. A long, drawn whistle sounded deliberately and provocatively through the laughter.

Everyone, actors and audience, were petrified for the moment.

All except Gaspard. He turned as though to see where the whistling came from, and began looking round the furniture on the stage. He rubbed his forehead. The pot on the stove—it was letting off steam! A second whistle was heard. But as soon as Gaspard sprang across and took off the lid, the whistling stopped. The audience did not guess, of course, that Gaspard had whistled the second time on his own whistle.

But the whistler in the audience was not to be scared off. He began again, louder than ever. Gaspard ran to the pot again. The audience did not agree with the interrupter, but being Parisians of the slums, they accepted the whole thing as a joke. They didn't

join in the whistling, but they did not howl him down. It was a duel between the whistler and the actor, and they were curious to see who would win.

Gaspard accepted the challenge. He had ten different ways of finding out which of the pots was whistling. The nightingale under his tongue competed with the whistling from the gallery. At first the audience was confused, but presently it grasped Pierrot's tactics and applauded him loudly.

But when the hooligan at the back did not leave off and the interlude was prolonged too far, Gaspard suddenly interrupted the play and came forward to the footlights.

"Silence!" someone shouted. Gaspard took the whistle out of his mouth and showed it, saying: "I wanted to offer my whistle to the gentleman at the back. I've just remembered that the one he stole from my dressing room just before the play is a whistle that I once swallowed. The fact that it's still in the world shows that it traveled a rather humble route. . . ."

Laughter and applause from the first person in the loges to understand. Others followed. Then everyone was laughing and applauding Pierrot's coolness. Gaspard glanced at the box where a handsome, middle-aged man, faultlessly dressed and with an intelligent face, was sitting. Then he swung his arm and flung the whistle into the auditorium. Fresh laughter accompanied this gesture; the people were all with Gaspard. Someone snatched a candle from the wall and everyone took Gaspard's part and began to look for the disturber. They caught him and held up the light to his face. Gaspard was not mistaken. It was Godet. But he could not leap across the whole parterre now, and catch him by the throat, he had to go on with the play.

The distinguished, attentive face in the box encouraged him. Soft applause was heard from that side, and another bravo. Gaspard flung himself back into the play once more. He had hardly taken two steps away from the footlights, when he was Pierrot once again. A few swift steps, a sudden halt, a shock of surprise—and he had the attention of the audience once more.

The play continued. There was no further unpleasantness. Gaspard concentrated his efforts, and his Pierrot was as dazzling as usual. It was a long time since a performance had given him such pleasure. But suddenly he was afraid—afraid to leave the stage and go back to his grief over Coquette, go back from this land of fairy tales to the bitterness of real life. He showed his love

for the stage more ardently than ever—and his affection for the public—when he thanked them for their applause at the end.

The worst part came first, when he had got back to his dressing room and was cleaning off his make-up. The door flew open and Bertrand stood on the threshold, paler than Pierrot himself.

"Debu—Debureau!" he stammered. "D'you know who he was—the man in the box?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"It was—the king of Parisian critics—Jules Janin!"

And he almost collapsed and leaned against the wall.

## XII

### THE BEST WEDDING PRESENT

TWO days later an article appeared in the *Journal des Débats* signed J. Janin, which disturbed the theatrical world to its depths and was the talk of the green rooms and foyers of all the theaters in Paris. This is what was in the famous article :

"I do not want today to repeat to the public of Paris that the glory of the French theater is passed. Everyone knows that Cherubino has false teeth, the Contessa is living in exile, and Figaro, disillusioned by so many revolutions, has picked up his staff and gone off to sun himself in the south. Not even the glorious and discriminating Parterre of the French theater remains, it has long been buried, and Figaro and Almaviva have wept on its grave.

"However, I consider it my duty to inform Paris that if there is no theater, there is the Funambules. And if there is no parterre from the Café Prokop, there is the parterre of the Théâtre des Funambules, a fiery, lively audience who love strong wine and a good joke. Art used to drive in a carriage, now she goes on foot. She used to pick her way on chopines, now she trudges through the mud in clogs. She used to have her nightly ovation, the King at her feet, her lodging in the Palais Royal ; now she feeds on potatoes in the Boulevard du Temple, mends her stockings in the doorway of her theater, and gets tipsy on cheap wine. The art of the theater used to be called Molé or Talma ; today its name is Debureau.

"A critic who does not wish merely to carry out his dreary official duty, but who seeks inspiration and is an artist himself, follows his passion. I found mine yesterday, found it at one of the theaters of the boulevards. In one of these unknown little theaters, in the smallest and lowliest of them, by the light of four wretched candles and to the sounds of the menagerie which are wafted in—I found and was forced to admire a clown who is a great actor—Debureau!"

Debureau had no idea what a commotion this article caused. He knew nothing of the fierce discussions, the inquiries, protests, criticisms. He did not know how the readers in the polite world were showing the extraordinary and unexpected article to each other and asking each other who Debureau was. No one had



ever heard of him. And where on earth was the Théâtre des Funambules?

Gaspard only knew one thing: that early in the morning he was awakened by a frenzied knocking on his door, and when he sleepily opened it, Bertrand fell into his arms, enfolded him in a tearful and alcoholic embrace, and shouted:

"We've pulled it off, Gaspard! We've pulled it off! Vittoria!"

Gaspard thought that the manager was drunk and had lost his way home. But Bertrand pulled out a newspaper, the *Journal des Débats*, and showed him the article, and Gaspard sat down on the bed and spelled out the lines word by word while Bertrand's finger waved to and fro before his eyes and Bertrand's voice read the article once more aloud.

Gaspard read and read, and when he came to the name Debureau, he went back to the beginning and read it over again—but it was not a mistake, it was really about him.

"Isn't it meant sarcastically?" he asked fearfully.

"Not a bit, man. We've made him sit up and take notice. We've shown him what real art is, see?"

Debureau was silent, not daring to imagine what this article really meant.

"D'you know what we'll do now?" chortled Bertrand. "We'll close the theater. I'll have it done up. Now!"

"And people will forget about this—"

"They won't, you'll see. Quite the other way. Before it gets about we'll have started playing again. In an enlarged theater. A week from now."

"But that's just when I'm getting married."

"Which is more important, marriage or glory?"

"I've been so looking forward to my marriage. If you like, I'll show you where we're going to live. It's here in the same house, three floors down. Two lovely little rooms."

"It doesn't interest me," Bertrand defended himself. "You can live in the Louvre if you like. But in a week's time you must act."

"But I can't."

"I've got it, Debureau!" Bertrand had a sudden idea. "Hurry off and find your bride and take her to church now! Get a dispensation for the last publication of the banns—I'll pay for it. Off with you and get married—not today, we've got to play this evening—get married tomorrow!"

He folded up the newspaper and hurried out. There were so

many cafés in which he must show himself and brag about Janin's article! All Paris would be pointing at him. That's the manager of the *Funambules*! And acquaintances would ask him: I say, what are you doing at that theater of yours? He would not answer; he would be mysterious. Let them come and see.

"That's settled then. You get married tomorrow. And tonight we'll announce to the public that the theater is closing for a week," he said to Gaspard before he left.

A few minutes later Gaspard hurried out of the house. He bought a *Journal des Débats*. He walked along the street watching the people out of the corner of his eye. The corner of the newspaper stuck ostentatiously out of his pocket. But, he thought, it isn't everyone who reads the dramatic criticism in the *Journal des Débats*.

Doubts overwhelmed him once more. Supposing people just laughed and took it as a good joke? To say that great drama is dead, that its audiences are dead—was not that too grim a joke? And to put in their place the brawling audience of the *Funambules*? That was too daring. No one would believe it. It was simply inviting ridicule.

Hopes and fears alternated in his heart as he went to find Désirée. He showed her the newspaper with a careless smile. He feared ridicule, but Désirée was really astonished. Her eyes fixed themselves on her bridegroom in wonder.

"No! Is it really about you?"

"Have a good look at me!" said Gaspard with a bow.

He arranged with her about the wedding and then hurried to the priest's house and on from there to invite Christophe and Adolphe. He could only find Adolphe, who did not greet him very warmly.

"We aren't coming to your wedding."

"Why not? Aren't we still comrades?"

"We aren't if you want to know."

"Why not?"

"You've no sense, Gaspard. D'you think we should fit there? With the newspapers writing about you—saying you're a tip-top actor and all the rest of it—we shouldn't belong there."

"But I want to have you with me."

"Next time you want to drown yourself, Gaspard, we may have a shot at pulling you out—or we may not. But we fit in your world like a boot on your hand. Leave us in peace."

"But I don't want to lose you."

"Justine understands these things, and she says you might be ashamed of us one day."

"Never!"

"And look here, Gaspard, we like to live our lives in our own way—with no one butting in. Is that clear enough? We don't need you. When you need us, come. And act for all you're worth. We may come and see the show some time."

Then Adolphe took him and simply threw him out of doors.

"Don't dare show yourself here again."

There was nothing for him but to nod with a smile, look round once or twice, and walk away.

There was still the theater, and there everything went off like a swift and lovely dream. The other actors were less envious than he expected. The glory of Debureau's name reflected on them, too. They applied to themselves every sentence and every work of praise which Janin had used for the theater as a whole. It was only in secret that they said: Why does he only name *him*—is he mad or mistaken—why Pierrot?

All the seats were sold out. The boxes and the front rows were filled. People had hurried from the center of Paris to get tickets and be the first to see this remarkable, unknown actor whom the famous Janin dared to call a great artist. There was much distrust on their faces as they cast scornful glances over the interior of the theater and at the audience in the cheap seats who were amusing themselves in their customary way. They tossed their heads disdainfully when they saw the few smoky candles and listened to the feeble orchestra. The ladies held smelling salts or eau de Cologne to their noses, and even that was no use. The smell! And the menagerie outside! No, they could not believe it. Janin must be playing a practical joke on his readers, and those who had stayed at home this evening would prove to be in the right.

Debureau was in love with everything that evening. He entered his dressing room filled with quiet happiness. He caressed the back of the chair, the mirror. With devout care he smeared paint on his face, inhaling its well-known scent with satisfaction.

It was not the intoxication of fame; it was gratitude. He was not really famous yet. It would have to spread much further. But he loved his surroundings and all the details which nightly accompanied him on his way to the stage. The hare's foot with which he put the powder on his face—how often had he taken its softness in his hand, excitedly, calmly, on sad and happy evenings!

He was happy simply because he had found a man who believed in his ability. And when he was dressed, when he smoothed his collar and gave his face a last dusting of powder, he had such a feeling of well-being.

When the performance was over there was more noise and gaiety, and before the audience left the theater, Bertrand appeared in his frock coat and announced that the Théâtre des Funambules, which had long been inadequate to the needs of the distinguished public, was going to be rebuilt. He begged the audience graciously to bear in mind that the new premises would be inaugurated in a week's time with a performance of a new and magnificent pantomime, "The Mad Bull," which will be rehearsed in the interval. And he added with feigned embarrassment that this pause happened very opportunely for the darling of the public, Monsieur Debureau, who was getting married next day.

This was the occasion for more vociferous mirth. The spectators in front did not pay much attention to it, but they studied Gaspard with his shining eyes and were quickly convinced that Janin was right and that Pierrot was an unusual artist. The crowd at the back, however, who had never considered what art was or whether Debureau should be described as an artist, but who praised his artistry with a simple: "That was a good joke!"—this part of the audience was delighted with the news of his wedding and shouted their pleasantries over the heads of the front rows.

"Come back to us safe and sound, Pierrot!"

"And hurry up with the twins!"

And Pierrot was more pleased with these crude remarks than with the applause; they convinced him that he had really won the affection of his audience. And that was what he had longed for in his most daring dreams, that was how he imagined the theater: not as something elevated which had to be watched with majestic horror, but plain folk who came to be amused by one of themselves.

When Debureau was going next morning to fetch Désirée he found in the pocket of the black coat borrowed from Bertrand a newspaper with an article answering Janin. There was nothing bad about him, but a certain Monsieur Pyat took the opportunity of squaring his accounts with the king of the critics. He wrote that if Art did not pick her way on chopines, Criticism should. It seemed, however, that in the person of Monsieur Janin, Criticism had even cast away the toga of seriousness and taken on too much

the likeness of an inquisitive little girl idling about the streets. Monsieur Janin, in his efforts to find Art, had found Pierrot, but had become the Clown himself.

It tempered his high spirits a little, but Bertrand and Laurent, who was his second witness, cheered him up again. "You'll see! Janin has got sharp teeth; he'll defend himself!" they said.

Gaspard was not altogether satisfied with his wedding. Désirée, it is true, looked very pretty in a new dress which she and Annette had sat up two nights to finish. Everything in the church had a grave and pious air. But the priest who married them had an itching in his ear and kept scratching it while he was pronouncing the sacred words; and he was in such a hurry, too. Gaspard ached to push him out of the way and marry himself with all the grandeur and reverence which the moment merited.

During the ceremony a crowd of people gathered in the church. Some had been informed and others had found out that "a clown from the theater is getting married," and soon there was a distinguished though uninvited and undesired audience. And when they came out of the church there were more than one hundred people there who knew their Pierrot and who began to chant the familiar:

"Ho—ho—ho! Debureau!"

He was surprised and delighted. It was nothing to him that some of them had only come to laugh. It was enough that there were at least a few who loved him and looked on him as a comrade.

"Can I invite them?" asked Debureau.

"He's raving," said Bertrand, alarmed. "Your rooms will hardly contain *us* as it is. D'you want to shower pieces of gold among them?"

So Gaspard had to content himself with showering his most cordial smiles among them. And Désirée was radiant with pleasure at the ovation and at her new state. She was madame, the wife of a famous man. Certainly no one would come and shout in chorus at Annette's wedding when she married her sergeant, if she married him at all.

They reached their street. Gaspard had already moved down to the flat on the second floor. There was just enough room for the guests to take their places round the poor table. Besides the bride and bridegroom there were Bertrand and Laurent, Annette and her lover. What a pity you are not here, Dorothy! You would certainly have enjoyed it, thought Gaspard.

But they had hardly sat down to table when the chorus sounded again from outside:

"Ho—ho—ho! Debureau!"

Bertrand held Gaspard back and leaned out of the window himself. He bowed and smiled pleasantly, but the people down below were not pleased. They began to whistle.

"You'd better go yourself," said Bertrand.

Debureau leaned out of the window and bowed till he nearly fell out, and threw down some flowers.

But again he was greeted with whistling. Someone shouted something.

"I can't understand what they say."

Bertrand slapped his forehead.

"They want the garter. The bride's garter."

Gaspard could understand the shouting too now.

"They want your garter," he ventured, looking at Désirée.

"But how shall I keep my stocking up?"

"I'll lend you mine," said Annette, and proceeded to make the exchange. Désirée took hers off and Gaspard, as the happy bridegroom, leaned out of the window again and threw out the blue ribbon. There was apparently a scuffle over it down below, but the crowd had got its trophy and marched away in triumph.

Gaspard had now to wait for the guests invited to the ceremony to withdraw. At last they went, but he had scarcely shut the door behind them and turned to Désirée when there was more knocking at the door.

"Who's there?"

"C'est moi, Bertrand! Open the door or I'll knock the house down!"

"What's happened?"

Bertrand plunged in with the latest number of the *Journal*.

"Janin's answer!" And they all crowded round the paper and read it eagerly. Janin wrote:

"I am glad to turn clown if in that disguise I can tell my readers the truth. M. Pyat wants to tell the truth, but people consider him a clown. That is worse. I have the courage to repeat that at the Théâtre des Funambules an actor is playing, by the name of Debureau, who is a master of his art because, as I saw for myself, he is able, under his white make-up, to express all human joys and sorrows without speaking a word, and without having Molière or Shakespeare to help him.

"From the response which my article has called forth, it seems

that I have discovered this actor. I consider this an honor. And I am sure that this is not just a case of an actor who has had a stroke of luck. Debureau is a great soul imprisoned in a tiny theater, but for all that he shines like the sun. His acting is not a fortunate accident; it is the result of work and love. At a time when it seemed that every variation of Italian comedy had been exhausted, he brings us one of a quite different type. The monstrous smock of the old-fashioned Gilles falls into folds of classic beauty upon him; his white face makes him the living statue of dumb-show. He is no longer the old clown, Gilles, throwing himself aimlessly about the stage, he is a stoic, calm but good tempered, without passion, without words, almost without a face. And yet his face expresses everything; he is the successor of Roscius, whose dumb tongue could translate Cicero word by word, the successor of Pylades, Æsop and Bathyllus, whom the Pontic king asked Nero to send as ambassador to nations of unknown speech. His face, furrowed with dumb and victorious sarcasm, says everything. Debureau walks, looks, opens his mouth, closes his eyes, smiles at you, enchants you. At the Funambules you have a rest from the tragic attitude. Because Debureau is everything: he is the people, he is a thousand herbes in one. Do not ask him his name and calling; he is the people: gay, sad, well, ill, gentle, coarse, thoughtful and thoughtless, taking and receiving buffets, always poor—the people! Dumb-show in his service becomes art once more. Debureau is its last protagonist; in his hands it attains grandeur. He is the people's actor and might not please our distinguished spectators if they plucked up their courage to enter the Théâtre des Funambules; but he remains an artist, and through no efforts of mine. He was an artist before I found him. I am only his Amerigo Vespucci."

They reached the end. Bertrand said something, but Gaspard did not hear him. He only came to himself again when they had all gone and Désirée had her arms round him and was kissing him and asking him something.

What a noble heart Monsieur Janin must have to dare to fight for him, an unknown person! That was what impressed Gaspard more than all the praises, though the words "A thousand actors in one" were still ringing in his ears. And the certainty, the artistic certainty that he was going the right way, flooded his whole being.

"Gaspard, Gaspard!" pleaded Désirée. "Don't you love me any more? When you're famous won't you even notice I'm here?"

"Of course I shall, Désirée," said Gaspard. "But you know that up to now I've been toiling through the mud with rain falling on me all the time; and now suddenly I feel firm ground

under my feet and sunshine above me—and someone great is holding out his hand to me.”

“Why, you can talk in quite flowery language now, my famous man!”

“And the thing that makes me happiest is that I’ve never asked for it. I’ve just gone my own way, the way I felt I ought to go—I’ve wanted to give myself to the people—and now they see that.”

But Désirée was sad about it.

“You’re happier about that than about our wedding.”

“It’s my wedding present,” smiled Gaspard.

“The best one?”

“No,” said Gaspard tenderly. “I know something much more important than that.”

“What’s that?”

He crushed her in his arms and whispered:

“Your other garter, *chérie*.”



### XIII

#### IN THE RANKS OF THE ROMANTICS

GASPARD DEBUREAU and his wife were off on their wedding journey. There were going to the Boulevard du Temple. For so many years Gaspard had spent every evening on the stage as an actor. During this week of freedom he longed to turn spectator. In the mornings he went to rehearsals in the theater which was being done up, among the falling plaster and the noise of hammering; and in the afternoon, after dinner at some cheap restaurant, he went for a stroll with his wife to some park or woods. In those days the Bois de Boulogne was not part of Paris, it meant an excursion into the country. In the evening they came back into the town and mixed with the crowds on the boulevard like ordinary people.

They had frequent occasion to see the way carriages would draw up before the Funambules, and gentlemen jump out and read the notice, after which they would tell the ladies in the carriage in a disappointed voice that the theater was undergoing alterations and repairs.

For these seven nights Gaspard wanted to be a spectator, a childish and delighted spectator who had to make up for everything that he had missed by being imprisoned for life on the stage. So hand in hand with Désirée he visited the waxwork show. They danced together, Désirée lightly and Gaspard awkwardly, au Bleu Carré, and sat among the naïve spectators at the Chinese shadow play. Finally on Sunday they went to Franconi's Olympic Circus where they were among the most enthusiastic about the Indian jugglers, Chinese acrobats, and performing goats and elephants.

While Désirée only saw a clever or clumsy turn, Debureau looked beneath the mask and the smile of all the champions, acrobats and jugglers. Sometimes he remarked casually on something which he could do better himself; but in the main he watched kindly and indulgently. Often Désirée had to drag him home by force, especially when they stopped on the Quai des Augustinians to see the conjurer Miette.

"C'est mon frère," Gaspard whispered to Désirée when she made him come away, "entends-tu?" And Miette, who was as good a talker as he was a conjurer, would explain between the different tricks how people had tried to lure him to the theater. "I like you, ladies and gentlemen, you who are standing here with your mouths open, much better than a theater audience who would go to sleep. Walk up, walk up, walk up, ladies and gentlemen, soldiers, countrymen and tramps, and don't be afraid of me. I'm the glorious conjurer Miette, and though that's all I am, I'm made of the same stuff as the most famous Marshal of France."

The onlookers laughed. And isn't he right? thought Gaspard as he went away. These glimpses of the evening amusements of Paris were of great service to him. He had got away from his own milieu and was learning anew what people liked and did not like. Often Désirée had to nudge him to make him look at the stage. Often she suspected him of making eyes at another woman; but Gaspard was only completing his studies. He liked to watch the expressions of the people round him, their suspense and their burst of laughter.

He was able to form a better picture of how Parisians liked to be entertained, what they watched, what different places had to offer them, and what place the Théâtre des Funambules occupied in the flood of spectacles and diversions.

Thus their week's honeymoon dwindled day by day. Finally on the Saturday they went out to Belleville in an omnibus full of grisettes. It was a glorious day. Gaspard was ready to buy up all the sweets he saw, and Désirée still had her pockets full of fritters and sugar animals. It was the last day of freedom.

On Sunday performances began again.

The raucous crier took up his position outside the renovated entrance, but he did not importune the passers-by with a single word. He stood blissfully on the stones and the most he did was to exchange a joke with some pretty girl walking alone.

In spite of this, many people came up on foot or in carriages to buy tickets at the booking office.

"Hélas, Monsieur, everything is sold."

"This evening, then?"

"All sold."

"Sold out for the whole week. I can reserve you seats for next Sunday. No charge for booking."

Gaspard was rather disappointed when he looked at the spectators. They were not his old friends any more. In the rebuilt and redecorated auditorium there sat a quite different set of people: the élite! Perhaps his old friends had been frightened away. Perhaps they only felt at home under that blackened ceiling and were alarmed by the new entrance. The thought made him uneasy. Would he have to fight his battle over again? And would this new audience be pleased with the things which he had given the old?

But folk are the same at core, had he not often said so? Had he not been convinced plenty of times that the old conjurer Miette was right: all men are made of the same stuff. There was something else which strengthened him: the assurance given him by Janin. Jeer at an actor and you spoil everything, he loses confidence. Praise him, and he develops. It is not vanity, but confidence. For an actor's playing is like walking on a tightrope over a chasm. There is no more unstable action. Especially for a mimic, who has not even words with which to convince his audience. He needs a word of appreciation to help him to act better. And he wants nothing more than the two words: we understand. Say that to him and you will understand him three times as well.

All Gaspard's fears were dispersed by the first performance. It was a fresh success; even if there was less clapping and shouting, admiration could be felt in the applause. Bertrand did nothing but trot up to Gaspard and pat him genially on the shoulder, and Gaspard smiled at him. They had made a success of it.

All the following evenings confirmed it. They were only a repetition of the first night. Part of the old audience came back, but the boxes and the front rows remained especially for the masters of Paris, those from the center of the city.

Jules Janin had made Debureau the fashion.

The first thing discussed everywhere was Janin's scandalous criticism which was felt to be an insult not only to the official theater, but to all order and good government. Then there came the reports of the first visitors who had ventured into the jungle of the Boulevard du Temple. Because the majority of them were enthusiastic lovers of the theater and some of them eager critics, and because they were one and all for Janin and Debureau, the salons had to alter their opinion.

Debureau became more than the fashion, he became an article of faith. It was now proved beyond possibility of denial that in the old theater of the Funambules a real artist had been dis-

covered whom one had to go and see, though it was three times as far as the Comédie.

"If you're bored or depressed, you simply must go to the Funambules." Debureau became the guaranteed cure for grief, bad humor and spleen.

"I don't like the coarseness and bad taste that you get at those theaters in the slums," would be the objection. But anyone who had seen him was really delighted and would convince the unbeliever:

"You may get them at the Comédie, but you won't get them here."

"I don't like farce," said the skeptics.

"What Debureau acts isn't farce, or comedy, or drama—it isn't anything you can define."

"Well, what does he act?"

It was hard to answer that question, because this second play had been adapted by the author for Pierrot in the flesh, and then readapted by Pierrot. It was in no recognized dramatic style; it had something of everything. It was a dream of cheerful and gaily colored life, lived by real people, but in a brighter, merrier, more exciting way.

The Théâtre des Funambules became the flower of the whole quartier. With its star actor it began to be counted among the important theaters of Paris. It still retained its exceptional character, but it definitely counted when one was considering where to spend the evening.

Gaspard often had visitors in his dressing room and received letters of congratulation, but the person whom he expected never came, and he did not dare to go and find him. This was his Amerigo Vespucci: Janin. And someone else: Victor Hugo. He very much wanted to prove to Hugo that he had made his way and was not the cipher which Hugo perhaps considered him. It was not pride. He was as hard working as ever, loving his profession and ready to give his soul for it. But he longed to be reinstated in the minds of those who might feel lowered by his friendship.

Hugo never came. But Gaspard was often able to bow to Nodier, and Gérard and their friends, who were delighted with the success of their protégé. What delighted him most of all was his success with the crowd of young artistes who came in threes and fours, sat close to the stage, and made more noise than anyone.

Sometimes they waited for him outside, but Gaspard was

usually tired, and besides there was Désirée alone at home, looking forward to his coming. So Gaspard refused, and all the more firmly as the day approached when he was to become a father.

"Nonsense!" cried a thin young man in a scarlet coat. "Debureau belongs to us and is coming with us, even if I have to cut him up and carry him away piece by piece."

"Théophile, Monsieur Debureau is married," one of the others warned him.

"You don't know women," Théophile told him. "Don't you know that they love you for your neglect?" Gaspard could not avoid the two determined arms and had to go where he was led.

"Where are we going?"

"Chez Graciani."

This was a Neapolitan who had opened a café not far away. It was quite a small place which would hold about twenty or thirty people. Gaspard's new friends were very much at home there. On the way and when they were seated, Gaspard had to answer all sorts of questions, interspersed with exclamations of delight.

"Quelle bonheur—to be for once at a performance without hearing stupid chatter—to be able to think out what your gestures mean," cried Théophile, whose other name was Gautier.

"Mon Dieu," said another whom they called Gérard and whose surname, Nerval, Gaspard only learned later. "One is at last safe from all the witticisms, ambiguities, pedantic tirades and toute cette expertise dans les conversations in which the authors of our idiotic comedies abound."

"Debureau, where did you learn your eloquence?" asked another, called Roger de Beauvoir.

"Nowhere, Monsieur."

Théophile was the recognized leader of the whole company.

"Cher Debureau, if we had a club you would have to be an honorary member. The first time we saw you I said to the others—'Mes amis, we must get hold of that fellow.' Or do you belong somewhere else?"

"I've never belonged anywhere."

"You belong to us. Because you have delivered us from all the bankers in our modern comedies, all the old generals, the elegant young gentlemen in yellow gloves, the philanthropists and quacks."

"But are they all in our modern comedies?"

"They're 'The Misanthrope,' 'Tartuffe,' all of them together."

They outvied each other in praise. Only Gérard de Nerval sat quiet. To Gaspard's horror he had wine brought to him in a human skull.

"Don't be surprised at our eccentric," murmured Théophile.

"You all seem to me eccentric," confessed Gaspard. "One with a skull, one with a scarlet coat, one with long hair. . . ."

"Because this gray and dreary and worn-out world must be smashed to pieces, mon cher Debureau. You are eccentric on the stage—you are different from the others—that's why you belong to us!"

They all considered him their spoil, their conquest, their new ally. Nerval raised his fantastic cup and proposed:

"To Gaspard Debureau's—revenge!"

They all turned to him in surprise.

"What for?"

"I don't know. Only he can tell us that. He is revenging himself on humanity."

"What makes you think that, Monsieur?" asked Gaspard.

"Your sarcastic smile."

"Gérard's mistaken," said Gautier. "It's more than revenge. It's more like forgiveness."

"Merci, Monsieur," Gaspard bowed. "That's better."

"Yes, or he couldn't plunge into all his adventures so lightly," explained Théophile. "If he were revenging himself, he wouldn't be so good. It's more like requital."

Gaspard listened with great interest. These thoughtful young men were revealing the source of his creativeness at which he only guessed subconsciously himself. He had built up his Pierrot from his own life, fragments of himself; but they analyzed him, and more fundamentally, it seemed to him, than he could have done himself.

Gaspard's horizon was broadening every moment as fast as the news of the Pierrot of the Funambules spread through Paris. He got to know more and more people. More critics wrote of him in the other newspapers. At last his wish was fulfilled and one evening the familiar face of Janin appeared in one of the boxes. Another actor might have let it be seen all the evening for whom he was acting, but Gaspard looked exactly as usual. Only at the end, when he made his bow, he looked towards the box and put his hand on his heart. Janin understood and bowed.

Then there was the fulfillment of Gautier's promise. It

turned out better than Gaspard had ever imagined. Victor Hugo appeared at the theater himself, and although it was winter and a bitter frost, he waited outside with some friends for Gaspard.

"I am happy," he said, holding out his hand, "to be able to greet in you our friend and helper."

Gaspard smiled uncomprehendingly.

"You create and incorporate on the stage the thing which we are striving after. And you preceded us." And as they were walking along he said in a more confidential tone: "And personally I'm glad to meet an old friend of whom I have always had les meilleurs souvenirs."

"May I ask how Eugène is?"

"He died last year."

Gaspard did not like to ask why Victor had not written and told him. Probably he had forgotten him long ago. But though Hugo did not behave crazily like the others and was thoughtful and balanced in his words and movements, he was so friendly to Gaspard that he preferred to forget it.

"Didn't you recognize your Watteau?"

"Watteau?" asked Hugo thoughtfully.

"You sent it me with a letter."

"Yes, I remember now. It was Pierrot—"

"You are responsible for my Pierrot," confessed Gaspard.

"No," protested Hugo. "You have built up a figure so completely new, so different from all that has been before, that I would rather call you the first revolutionary of our new revolution. My part in you is very small."

"What revolution?" asked Gaspard.

"You shall see and decide for yourself if you care to join us. We're living in the Rue Gujon now, and I hope you'll come along with us. And before we get there you must tell me about yourself. There's a big gap between our last meeting and today."

They walked on fast, Gaspard telling proudly of his marriage. And not only that. A week ago his son had been born; he was called Charles. They all congratulated him noisily.

A little later Gaspard stood in the middle of a large room shaking hands one after another with nearly thirty young people, most of whose names conveyed very little to him. Here and there was one which he had heard already: Balzac, Mérimée, Sainte-Beuve, Alfred de Vigny, whom he liked best of all because of his polished manner in the midst of all these long-haired and bearded wildlings. His black coat and white waistcoat, fair hair and gray-

blue eyes were restful. The others seemed aimless and unfinished, as if they were playing at being something different from what they were and had not yet reached the core of themselves.

The fair-haired Madame Hugo shook hands warmly with Gaspard. She still remembered their meeting in the Rue de Dragon. Now and then he distinctly heard from a corner the words: Who's that—the thin, tall man? And when his friends, Gautier and the others, left him alone he felt ill at ease. He did not feel at home and did not know what part he should play here.

He felt more at ease when Hugo began to read his play, "Hernani," though he could not actually say that he enjoyed it. Hugo had a very unpleasant voice, and in taking different parts he alternated between high and low tones. It was very trying, especially as Gaspard could grasp the fact that it was very pretty poetry, expressing chivalrous emotions. The other listeners, on the other hand, were enchanted and gave free vent to their enthusiasm. "Un nouveau Corneille," they kept on shouting; and when Hugo read the fourth act in which Carlos waits beside the tomb of Charlemagne to know if he has been elected Emperor, someone cried out in ecstasy, "C'est Hugo qui sera l'Empereur!"

Gaspard thought it was much ado about nothing, but he did not want to spoil Hugo's pleasure. He was grateful to Hugo for considering him worthy to join this hopeful company and choosing him as a fellow warrior under the flag of romanticism.

When the play was finished, Sainte-Beuve explained to all those present that "Hernani" was to have its première this winter. It would be the first great romantic drama to be performed, and great opposition was to be expected from the die-hards and the old fogies. This would have to be broken down. The manager of the theater had offered clagues to Hugo, but he and his friends had decided not to make use of them. The success or failure of "Hernani" was a matter of importance to all of them, because it would mean either the burial of all romantic tendencies for a long time, or a breach in the ramparts of tedious and narrow-minded classicism.

"There will be no clague, but we shall be there, friends, and la jeunesse who love us and are with us. Do you agree?"

"Yes!" they all cried, Gaspard excepted.

Thus one day in February a notice appeared on the doors of the Funambules, the like of which had never been seen there before.



NO PERFORMANCE TODAY.

GO TO THE PREMIERE OF "HERNANI"

BY VICTOR HUGO.

Bertrand had almost come to blows with Gaspard, but he had had to give in. And instead of Pierrot it was Gaspard Debureau who appeared today, not alone but with a group of other actors, suitably instructed and stirred up, not at the Funambules but at the Grand Théâtre, and not as an actor but as a spectator.

First they went to the Hugos' house where Madame Hugo was distributing tickets to friends, students from the university and art school, young actors. Just as Debureau arrived with his group he met Balzac.

"Bravo, Debureau!" he cried with a toss of his mane. "Hierro!"

"Hierro!" Gaspard returned the Spanish battle cry and led his company forward.

The empty places began to fill up, those which it had not been possible to obtain for Hugo's supporters for love or money. But they had at least ensured by timely occupation of the theater that his opponents would have no more than what they had actually booked in advance. It was clear that his adversaries would have the preponderance in the first gallery and the balcony.

"A la guillotine, les chauves," shouted the parterre in chorus. The atmosphere grew tense.

Alleviation was brought by the beauties who appeared here and there in the boxes. The young men were well informed and knew how to receive each one. There was wild applause on the appearance of the golden-haired Delphine Gay, poetess, journalist and playwright, and adored by Alfred de Vigny; and more applause still when Madame Hugo entered her box and smilingly acknowledged the reception.

The beginning of the play brought silence. Three knocks on the stage.

But hardly had the curtain gone up revealing the bedroom of Doña Sol when the classicists began to grumble:

"That's meant to be the beginning? In a bedroom?"

"Perukes, silence!" answered the romantics.

This was the wild atmosphere in which the play was acted. Debureau felt quite at home, as if he were at the Funambules.

"That's from 'Britannicus!'" some of the adherents of the classical school would shout from time to time. "That's from the 'Barber of Seville!'"

But the applause from the romantics silenced the shouts.

The first and second acts ended indecisively, but in the third the romantics secured a definite superiority. When Ruy Gomez reached Doña Sol the women in the parterre and the boxes clapped without distinction.

"Vivent les femmes!" the young men acknowledged with gratitude.

But the actors and actresses were visibly upset and uncertain. No word was free of provocation or sure not to cause a frightful uproar. Poor Victor was one moment in the auditorium and the next in the wings encouraging the actors and actresses, especially Mademoiselle Mars, the star of the play. But the more ground the romantics won in the auditorium, the better the actors played on the stage, and when at last the hoarse and exhausted classics left the field of battle or contented themselves with staring stupidly, there was satisfaction even on the stage. When the unhappy lovers both succumbed to death, the whole auditorium wept and applauded by turns. The victory was won.

In the wings the publisher Mame was hunting for the new successful author. Romanticism had won its first battle and entered the world through the breach in the fortifications.

Gaspard Debureau, independent and courageous forerunner, the first actor of his genre, fought that day as a humble, capable, and well-disciplined soldier.

## XIV

### DEBUREAU AT THE BARRICADES

"THE Muses are untamed and capricious young women," said Théophile Gautier at the Café Mogador, "they want a strong and vigorous young lover in their beds."

"Yes," said a young man who had an everlasting glass of absinthe before him and smoked unceasingly. "But we must say good-by to timorous conservatism and the whole bourgeois conception of life." It was Alfred de Musset.

"We must teach the public that the stage is not a school of morals for good notaries, but a mirror of life even in its deformities."

"You'll never convince them of anything of the sort."

"We'll convince them through the heroes of our dramas, who must impress them," declared Victor Hugo. "Hernani the brigand! I mean to write about the hunchbacked clown, Triboulet, about Lucrezia Borgia. . . . Dumas is writing about the crimes of Henry the Third. What's your opinion, Debureau?"

Gaspard came out of his reverie. He loved to listen, but did not care to talk himself. Questioned, however, he would not sail under false colors and in his slow, uncertain manner he said:

"I think the heroes you choose are too spectacular."

"We go to the places where romance lives."

"Then your mirror is a distorting one, friends."

"Where should we go?"

"Close at hand, not so far away."

"Lucrezia Borgia doesn't appeal to you?" Hugo thumped the table angrily.

"If you went out into the street now," Gaspard returned timidly, "you might find a richer being than Lucrezia out there on the pavement."

"A prostitute?" They were surprised.

Debureau shrugged his shoulders.

Only Victor Hugo pondered gravely.

"You may be right. But your own acting on the stage is unusual. For the theater one must find something extraordinary, distinctive. All the same—you may be right."

Alfred de Vigny gave a half smile:

"You make the world a seed plot for the exceptional. Your romantic youth are ashamed to have a haircut. You people Paris with ailing apparitions, with searing, tearing passions, suffering from melancholy and despising life. Your beauties won't eat because they're cultivating a melancholy appearance. Soon their only nourishment will be lemon and vinegar, to make them transparent."

"You can't eat, Alfred," said de Musset sadly. "That's why you can't even despair."

"No," said de Vigny, "but I look about me more. Gas light has changed Paris. The jugglers are taking refuge in the theaters. We need more sense of reality."

"Aren't you a secret supporter of the bourgeoisie, de Vigny? And the reactionary aristocracy?"

"You know yourself that I'm suffering from it and that I don't defend it at all."

This was true. They all knew that Madame de Vigny would not consent to her aristocratic son marrying the golden-haired poetess Delphine Gay, who had dedicated so many beautiful poems to him. She had just married Emile de Girardin, the founder of a popular newspaper. This name occurred to them all, and drew the conversation into other channels.

"Girardin's beginning a piece of nonsense in his paper today," said Hugo. "He's publishing a serial novel."

"Girardin's a clever fellow," said de Vigny generously.

"Clever?" said Gautier. "He's grasped the fact that what interests people most is gossip and slander. That characteristic of the human race is bringing him in millions."

"He has had other ideas too," de Vigny defended him. "Not long ago he introduced the so-called feuilleton, he organizes his criticisms better—and you know, this serial story he's publishing may be an interesting thing. It's such attractive reading. . . ."

"What is it?"

"*The Three Musketeers*. It's by Alexandre Dumas."

"That's simply superficial romanticism, as our friend Debureau was saying," declared Hugo. "True romanticism goes down to the depths."

"You're mistaken, Victor. Dumas can rouse a feeling for honor and beauty as few other men can."

"Monsieur Debureau," de Musset turned to him suddenly. "Why do you sit dumb even among your friends? Where do you find the truth?"

"Among the people, Monsieur."

Into the sudden silence fell another question:

"And our duty?"

And Debureau answered with quiet fervor:

"To free them!"

A few days after the wild première of "Hernani" Charles X made the Prince de Polygnac his minister. The Chamber passed a vote of no confidence. The King had been an object of hatred from the beginning. He was known to be the inveterate opponent of everything that could be called liberty. At the Théâtre des Funambules the fifth act of "The Mad Bull" showed Pierrot and Cassandra kneeling opposite each other and praying. When they rose Cassandra handed Pierrot a diploma which said in large letters: MINISTER. It was known that the meetings of the King and his minister to discuss affairs of state were passed kneeling in prayer.

In May there was a Fête Napolitaine at the Palais Royal with a blaze of lights and clouds of scent from orange trees. The three thousand guests danced, while outside the garden walls crowds of people cursed and threatened. And suddenly the fire broke out. But the distinguished guests saw and heard nothing. It was nothing to them that, in the twelfth scene at the Funambules, Pierrot and Columbine played at being gentlefolk, disguised themselves and danced the mazurka. Suddenly the place was full of smoke and flames; they had no idea that they were dancing on a volcano.

The pleasant atmosphere was lacking from the life of Paris these days. The well-dressed part of the audience was absent from the Funambules. Bertrand was anxious about it, but Debureau tried to soothe him.

"Don't worry, Bertrand, it's happening to more than one theater." And he played on with enthusiasm before his working-class audience.

In the meantime at St. Cloud the King, who had forgotten long ago that he had once acted Cherubino in a performance of "The Marriage of Figaro" with cousin Marie Antoinette, read through the ordonnance prepared by de Polygnac and then scratched with his pen. De Polygnac carried away the ordonnance and the King looked out towards Paris. It was a Saturday evening in summer: July.

Early on Sunday morning all Paris went out into the country

to dance at Romainville and Sceaux. The cafés at the Batignolles were full of artisans and their families, drinking wine and making merry. The grisettes wore their prettiest lace at neck and elbow. Everything was peaceful and happy, for these people barely read the newspapers, few of them could afford the extravagance, with a tax on each one of ten centimes and a postage stamp of five more.

But the journalists read the morning edition of *Le Moniteur*. "The Freedom of the Press is being tampered with!" it read. Debureau, who was acting in the afternoon, came home early and met a throng of wildly excited journalists in the Rue St. Marc, where *Le National* had its presses. They were discussing their manifesto, which was at every street corner by evening.

"The Government has stopped governing according to the law—so the duty of obedience is suspended!"

The journalists began the revolution. The news spread. A fresh appeal to liberty stirred up the indifferent and easygoing. The people coming home from their outing found the streets full of crowds, and saw a number of gendarmes sealing up a printing office. The machines were smashed to pieces. And away in the slums tomorrow's paper, which was already forbidden by the censor, was being printed by hand.

Debureau was on the stage. He had picked up eagerly all the details of what was going on outside. No. 6 or No. 9 of the supers kept running out to hear the news. The deputies were resolving on an appeal for calm, so as to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

"Then the people will show them," said Debureau.

Someone brought in a copy of the secretly printed *National*, demanding that France should decide whether life should be controlled by the wishes of the majority or of the minority. Gaspard took the paper, and in the scene where the soldier drove him out of the pawnshop, he tore off the soldier's white cockade, stamped on it, and then turned and showed him the newspaper in such a way that the audience saw the title: *Le National!*

"Bravo, Debureau!"

Gaspard was happy. Bertrand wrung his hands. He knew that if anyone gave him away he would be imprisoned along with Pierrot. But Gaspard was not thinking of that. The decisive moment had come and something must be sacrificed. And he was happier with the praise of the workmen of the neighborhood than with applause from nobly born palm. He had only been an actor

before. Now he was an actor, and in addition, a man and the brother of the oppressed.

He could hardly wait till the end. During the final scenes news came of the first skirmishes with the gendarmes and the soldiers. People were throwing stones, bottles, pieces of wood. Students, engineers, workmen, shopgirls, and laundresses—it was they who, without a leader, started the new revolution. Gaspard longed to be among them. His anguish when the Allies entered Paris years ago broke out in him again. He longed to see his beloved people of Paris better than they had been then. And he wanted to help them as far as he could. It was clear that the bourgeoisie had kindled the revolt, outraged by the haughtiness of the nobles, which was increasing daily. For them the freedom of the press was only a pretext. Those who joined from patriotism were the angriest of all. They could not forget the days when aristocratic ladies had flirted with the invading officers over the heads of wounded French prisoners.

While Debureau was acting his last scene but one, there came certain news that the gendarmes had fired on the crowd and killed a man outside the Théâtre Français. The people could not defend themselves; they had no arms.

"Bertrand, have you confidence in me?"

"Mais oui!"

"In my capacity of keeper of the armory as well?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. And don't be alarmed at what's going to happen now."

He went onto the stage, taking with him five old rapiers. He did not yet know how to go about it, but something would turn up. And chance favored him.

"Les gendarmes!" shouted someone from the doorway.

It was the right moment. A movement of his hands stilled the murmuring among the audience; he raised a finger in warning. Harlequin stood facing him, holding a dusty sword. Pierrot flung himself against the sword with empty hands; he was wounded and fell. But he sprang up at once, snatched up two rapiers, and chased Harlequin off the stage. It was not part of the play, but the people were beginning to understand; naked hands are useless against arms, they must have arms as well.

Gaspard flung the rapiers into the auditorium. Five hands caught and grasped them.

"And what about us?"

A commanding gesture. The whole audience were on their feet. They came forward, climbing over the seats. Now they were clambering onto the stage. Debureau raised the drop scene, opened the door of the armory and began to deal out weapons: old muskets, sabers, spears, halberds, pistols, guns.

"Bring it back!" was all he said.

"I'll bring it back!" promised each one.

In a few minutes the armory was empty, everything had been given out, everything that could be used at all, even old, impossible swords and battle-axes. Who knew what they might not come in for. The theater emptied in a hurry.

Bertrand was weeping with rage in the dressing room.

And Pierrot stood, exhausted and happy on the empty stage, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"You see how quiet it is," Charles X said that evening. "The people don't dare."

It was quiet. The smoke of the first shots had cleared away and the people had gone. Only the one dead man lay there as a warning. Where were the others? You would have found them in the inmost rooms in their houses, getting their weapons ready. Fencing schools and gunsmith's shops were full to overflowing. The thing to do now was to put the weapons in fighting trim and make ammunition for them.

"You shan't go out anywhere! You shan't!" wailed Désirée next morning to Gaspard in her arms.

"Don't be afraid for me. Come with me if you like. You can help make ammunition. Look out of the window—they're all marching along side by side. And the tricolor! Look!"

From the towers of Notre Dame fluttered the tricolor. People came hurrying down into the streets. The quiet was over. They were really marching along side by side; students, poets, journalists in frock coats and proletarians in smocks. Women stood on balconies and on the pavement, applauding their men. More and more tricolors appeared—after fifteen years! Before Debureau went out—alone without Désirée, who would not come—the Hôtel de Ville and the national bank had already been taken. People were trooping in from all sides.

"Bad man!" Gaspard heard someone call suddenly. Where, where had he heard that voice before? He looked from face to face. There! A pretty, passionate face with shining eyes. Where had he seen her before?



"Don't you remember me?" she asked as she passed him.

"Margot!" cried Gaspard, stopping her, remembering that night with Clément in the gambling house.

"I remember *my* lovers better—"

"Where are you going, Margot?"

"Nowhere. Just going to settle my accounts. Et toi?"

"I'm going because I'm happy that the people are brave—and I'm going to help!"

"Come along then. Vive la Liberté!"

They went with the stream as far as the Odéon, where the students were building barricades. Nourrix, the singer from the Opéra, sang "La Marseillaise" all the way up the hill. All along the street cartridge cases were being made ready, and people were throwing the paper for them out of the windows.

General Marmont, to whom the military command had been entrusted, made an attack on the insurgents, aiming at the Hôtel de Ville from two sides, one along the quay and the other along the boulevards. The first advanced successfully. There were some fresh victims. A youth carrying a flag flung himself forward against superior numbers shouting:

"If I die, friends, remember my name was Arcol!" He was killed as he advanced across the bridge which was later to bear his name.

The other column came up against the barricade and its advance was stopped. Gaspard was shooting with the others. Now and then he glanced at Margot who was handing up ammunition. The line of soldiers was decimated by the fierce, eager firing. The sun had never been as burning hot as it was that day.

A pause in the battle. The insurgents respected it. They drank to the soldiers from their wine bottles.

Margot was wounded. She was shot through the palm and her handkerchief was drenched with blood. But she did not go home. She lay propped against a box beside Gaspard, who had just been helping the others to fill up the barricade and was breathing heavily. Margot had no cherry-colored stockings this time and did not smell of *poudre à la maréchale*, she was poorer than she had been then, but she looked more beautiful. You did not think of love as you looked at her, but you thought: She's glorious! And Margot raised tired eyelids and sang under her breath as she had before:

"Je t'attends, je t'attends,  
L'oiseau revient au printemps . . ."

"They're worse off over there than we are," said someone and flung away an empty bottle. He was looking at the soldiers on the other side of the barricade at the end of the street. They were lying like corpses in their heavy uniforms, gasping for breath.

"Margot, where are you going?"

"Wait!" She sprang over the barricade, pushed the sentry aside, and went across to the soldiers with some bottles of wine.

"Go on, girls!" The leader of the barricade grasped her intention and urged on the others. A lot of them hurried across, and children with them, carrying refreshments to the soldiers—their enemies. They all accepted gladly, even young officers. But the army was disaffected now, ready to disobey. Heads were put together. Don't we belong with them? Why are we firing on them? And if we must fire, then, *mon Dieu*, fire at the windows. There was nothing else to do. The insurgents were hidden in windows, behind chimneys, in doorways, in cellars. They were advancing insidiously, bit by bit. Each house was a fort and a refuge for the wounded; each woman was a helper and a nurse. And still they parleyed. Don't fire on the people, don't fire on the people! The soldiers swore. *Au diable!* It was very hard to be in the King's service!

The night was quiet again.

When the sun rose next morning there were six thousand barricades in the narrow streets. But the people did not stay behind them. For the students from the Polytechnic had carried out a daring exploit; they had got into the barracks at Tournon. Now there were plenty of fresh arms! And then the museum of firearms! Everything was useful for something. And besides weapons, whatever else came handy. One student took the bow of King Charles IX, another the helmet of the Chevalier de Bouillon. In a few minutes the whole crowd looked like supers from the Opéra when they are giving a medieval play.

At noon the Louvre was taken. The royal portraits were cut to ribbons, but otherwise the people respected the treasures. "This is your property, no looting!" cried the sensible leaders. So the conquerors merely put on the princesses' dresses over their torn and bloody rags and danced fantastic quadrilles in the vast halls.

The people were victorious on all sides. The soldiers were surrendering to the insurgents by whole platoons. Only the Swiss stood firm; there were many casualties before they were driven back. Even officers came over to the people, stripping off their

gold lace and epaulettes. Whole regiments advanced in order with flags flying and bands playing and mingled with the people.

In the afternoon the news was spread abroad that Charles X wanted to negotiate with the people and was prepared to make concessions. But the people were past wanting to negotiate with Charles X. It was not a question now of getting rid of de Polygnac, but of the Bourbons.

Charles X fled.

The squares and boulevards overflowed with people. Gentlemen shook hands with workmen, embraced them and fraternized with them. In the evening graves for the fallen were dug just behind the barricades. "*Aux Français tombés pour la Liberté*" ran the inscription, daubed in red, white and blue. And hardly were the trenches filled than laughter and merriment broke out again. Casualties were to be expected, but gloire aux cieux, the Bourbons had gone for good at last!

And what now?

Gaspard Debureau went back to his theater. Margot went with him.

"I've often thought of you," she said.

"Are you still there?"

"No. I sell sweets chez Tortoni."

The people round them were embracing each other and singing. Gaspard was sorry to part from Margot like this.

"How about you?" he said. "Doesn't your wound need seeing to?"

"You won't bind it up for me, anyway," she said maliciously. "You'd better ask how about Paris!"

"I'm afraid," said Gaspard uneasily. "I'm afraid things won't be for the best. The people have fought, but no one's asked them anything."

"Perhaps that's for us to do," said the girl bitterly. "But don't you worry about me. I know what I'm about." She held out her uninjured hand. "And yet—you know—I've thought about you quite often. More than you think—"

"Margot!"

She had gone. And in that moment Gaspard felt that he loved her better than his own wife.

XV

THE THIRD SAD FRIEND

PIERROT of the Funambules was full of despair and heart-break.

The private sorrows which had collected in his heart in the course of past years had become a habit. His sensitive nature had a fresh load of pain: disappointment at the vain struggle, grief that justice was so heedless. It needed a great effort of will to reconcile him to such a world.

And this was the bridge to reconciliation:

"DEAR AND HONORED M. PIERROT DEBUREAU,

"Thank you for your play 'The Mad Bull' and the way you act in it. Yesterday evening I was awfully fed up with life and wanted to throw the whole thing up. My life isn't very happy anyway and I thought I'd do myself in, but I just happened to go past your theater and I said to myself, I'll see a show for the last time so I went in and when it was over I said to myself no, I won't do myself in after all, I've been in a different world and I feel much better and today I can't help laughing still and I mean to see the thing through so I thought I'd write and thank you because I shouldn't be here if it wasn't for you.

"Yours respectfully,

.....

This letter—one out of all the unwritten ones—reconciled him to his work and gave him fresh resolution. Fashionable society had returned to the Funambules and he had fresh proofs of the regard which was felt for him as an artist. Bouquet's portrait had long been hung. He even had his imitators. Invitations to fashionable salons were more and more numerous. The splendid Jules Janin invited him to a chat now and then because he had decided to satisfy the unceasing inquiries about Debureau's personality and write a whole book about his acting and his life. Gaspard passed a number of delightful hours in Janin's pleasant home, recalling his experiences and patiently answering all the questions of the readers of *Le Journal*, who wanted to know everything about him. What his preferences were, how many

times he had been in love, and what he liked to eat. He was also delighted to see in the boxes the leading Parisian actresses: Mademoiselle Mars, who had made a great stir in the première of "Hernani," and Madame Malibran, a sensational opera singer, also Charlet, the great painter of the Empire, who visited him in his dressing room and confided to him his disbelief in the news of the Emperor's death.

But the people for whom Gaspard acted above all were the poor and the destitute. He allowed Bertrand to put up the price of the loges by several francs and never claimed advantages for himself: but he insisted unconditionally on four sous for the pit. He wanted to have his coal vendors there, his shopgirls, workmen and students. He was on equally friendly terms with both sections of his public. To the boxes he showed a kind of tender gratitude, but his heart belonged to the parterre. The letter from the rescued suicide hung above his mirror and Debureau read it over again carefully each evening before he went on the stage.

Ceaseless acting gave him much experience. Routine resulted in increasing ease which spared him a certain amount of effort; he became a virtuoso in the minutest changes of meaning. He was never cold; but he was more sparing and moderate, he got his effects with a smaller use of means. But he never lacked interest and love.

They're feeling worse because they've been disappointed, he said. Let's give them some hope, a little cheerful laughter, at least some forgetfulness— That was his great ambition and pride and he did not hide it even in the company of his literary friends. Victor Hugo learned from him of the sufferings of poor people. His efforts to destroy the inhuman conditions of child labor were the result of this.

But a certain visit to the boxes one evening filled Debureau with rapture and his heart flew to meet the unusual visitor. It was the man whom Gaspard had loved ardently at a distance for many years and whom he took as his model.

Béranger!

Debureau was uplifted as he had never been before. He remembered reciting Béranger's poems as a youth in the courtyard at St. Maur. He kept remembering all the occasions when Béranger was the interpreter of all the griefs, hopes and hates of the people—and of Gaspard himself. He acted as usual, but whenever he could he had a good look into the gloom of the box where the majestic and smiling old man was sitting.

And when the play was finished and the curtain had fallen, and Béranger stood up in his overcoat, clapping with the others, Gaspard asked for silence and, turning to the box with a deep bow—to show that he whom they were applauding wished in his turn to pay honor—he, who never spoke or sang on the stage, signaled to the guitarists in the orchestra and half-recited, half-sang a poem of Béranger's which he knew by heart like so many others:

“Laissez-moi donc sous ma bannière,  
Vous, messieurs, qui, le nez au vent,  
Nobles par votre boutonnière,  
Encensez tout soleil levant.  
J'honore une race commune,  
Car, sensible quoi'que malin,  
Je n'ai flatté que l'infortune.  
Je suis vilain et très vilain,  
Je suis, vilain,  
Vilain, vilain.”

The audience understood. Béranger had tears in his eyes as he smiled benevolently. Gaspard was overjoyed at the chance to do honor to his teacher in public. Béranger made him a little bow, as one comrade to another, and the audience clapped them both in gratitude and admiration: Béranger who sang to them for love, and Debureau who acted for them.

Both had the same Muse: the people.

Gaspard Debureau's family life was monotonous, but it satisfied him. Each free moment that he had he devoted to Désirée, but sometimes they were few. She hated salons and everything of this sort because of it, and persecuted him with jealousy. When Mademoiselle Trouvé, a fairly well-known sculptor, visited him to make a drawing of his face on porcelain, Désirée made a terrible scene. Mademoiselle Trouvé was forced to content herself with an old sketch of Bouquet's as a model. Sometimes Gaspard could not resist Hugo's invitations to come and act in private theatricals which he and his friends Houssaye, Gautier and Nerval got up for their own amusement, but always when he got home at night she would reproach him bitterly for making her suffer. And always after these outbursts there were days of sulking.

When Charles was born, their life together gained in warmth and confidence. Désirée could not understand his delight at things

like the poem which Béranger dedicated to him. She could not understand his enthusiasm when he told her about the revolt in Poland, not realizing that his experience at the siege of Warsaw when he was four years old had made him feel a little bit of a Pole himself. Debureau overcame all this and made his wife feel his affection through the child. Their affections met and joined in the boy; even in their worst quarrels they still loved each other because both loved him.

A certain monotony could not be avoided. Gaspard was an attentive husband, but most of the day he spent at the theater. He was never at home in the evening; and so much solitude was too much for a woman like Désirée.

"Take a day off," she would plead. "Say you're ill." But to Gaspard his art was a duty; he never asked for anything for himself, and he was never ill or indisposed. He was the most conscientious worker of all, always ready to give help when needed. The theater was still half his heart.

He imagined that Désirée became more reconciled to this state of affairs; at least he got that impression. She did not nag so when he spent the evening with friends or spent an hour in one of the literary salons after the play. She did not reproach him with it.

Gaspard confided this change with satisfaction to Laurent, who was playing Harlequin. Laurent merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled, and his smile seemed unpleasant to Gaspard, though he thought he must be mistaken. But when they were going back to their dressing rooms after the curtain, he heard Laurent telling the others something; there was a laugh, and then one of them said:

"As if she would keep him at home—when there may be someone else there!" And there was more laughter.

Gaspard strode in. He did not want to surprise them, only to see how they would behave. There was a sudden silence. Someone began whistling with elaborate carelessness; the others were all busily engaged in making up their faces. Gaspard was sure now: they had been talking about him.

He said nothing, and pretended not to notice; but he hurried with the play. He needed twice the effort to concentrate.

"You're more tragic than usual tonight," said Bertrand.

"You just think so."

"Are you coming along with us?"

"I can't."

He hurried home as fast as he could. It was only a stone's throw away round the corner. Désirée was sleeping peacefully, with little Charles beside her. But Gaspard was too sensitive; he felt that a slur had been cast upon him. He would never be able to sleep if he did not rid himself of the idea. So he dropped a book. Désirée moved.

"I'm sorry, did I wake you up?"

"I was only dozing."

"Have you been asleep long?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I just wondered," he said defensively. And suddenly: "Has anyone been here?"

"Why, who should have been here?"

"I thought I passed someone on the stairs."

Désirée sat up. "Why are you talking in this strange way? Who could have been here in the night when I'm asleep?"

Debureau forced himself to smile. "You're so beautiful. I couldn't wonder at it if someone ventured to make use of my absence—and come to see you, at least to your door—"

"Who put that idea into your head?" She lay back on her pillows.

Aha, thought Gaspard, I can go on talking. She wants to put me off. But she shan't. I want to know the truth tonight.

"You might have told me about it. It's a small matter—and I've had to hear about it from other people."

"What are you driving at?"

"This: someone is coming here in the evenings, someone whom you like."

"You're crazy."

He realized that he had begun the wrong way and would learn nothing this way. He came up close to her bed, sat down and stroked her tenderly.

"Désirée, ma chérie, you know how much I love you. I shan't make a scene. I've been told you're unfaithful to me. Dearest, don't leave me to become a laughingstock. I love you so much, I won't be angry, even if it's true. I promise you. I forgive you beforehand. But tell me the truth."

Désirée sat up again, but this time her voice sounded hard and aggressive.

"If that's true, what's the fuss about?"

"I want to know how I must behave. I repeat, I forgive you—"



"Oh, keep your forgiveness. You haven't the right to blame me or forgive me—the sort of life you give me."

"But, Désirée, you knew I was an actor."

"But I didn't know you were a revolutionary and I don't know what besides—and that you'd love the brasserie more than your home!" cried Désirée excitedly.

"That isn't true!" cried Gaspard.

The baby woke up and began to cry.

"I'm alone all day and all the evenings. You don't care about me."

"I have so many obligations, Désirée."

"The obligation to lounge about the streets! Well, I've obligations too, to look after myself and my happiness—I don't interfere with you, don't you interfere with me!"

"Then it's true!" cried Gaspard as if he had been stabbed.

There was a knock at the door.

"Who's there?" called Gaspard, but seized with a sudden suspicion, he hurried from the room and opened the door. Before him stood a thin young man. Gaspard did not look straight at his face.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply.

"I've come to ask you to be quiet. I live next door with my mother and sister. They're both rather poorly . . ."

Gaspard took him lightly by the arm and went out with him. He was shaken by jealousy and mistrusted all the world.

"How is it you're dressed?" he asked, as he took him out onto the stairs by the window into the courtyard.

"I was just going out."

"At this time of night?"

"I sleep in the day and go out at night, Monsieur Debureau."

"So you know me?"

"Oui, Monsieur. We moved here a fortnight ago and I was very happy to find that I am your neighbor."

No, this wouldn't be the man; but perhaps he could find out from him. He stared into the young man's bright black eyes and thin brown face, clearly visible in the moonlight. It was a timid face, but with an undercurrent of wildness in its timidity.

"Ecoutez, Monsieur . . ."

"My name's Bertrand, Aloysius Bertrand."

"Monsieur Bertrand, you heard me shout this evening. I promise you that in consideration for your mother I'll be very quiet in the future. But I ask you to do something which will set

my mind at rest. You must certainly hear if anyone comes here. Has anyone been to my flat, for instance, this evening?"

The young man called Bertrand looked at him gravely. He was at most twenty-five, but the serious gaze of his sunken, patient face made him look much older.

"Monsieur Debureau, mon monde est tout à fait autre."

"What d'you mean?"

"Ah, Monsieur, the moon's in the water—I'll jump in and fish her out for you. But don't ask me to find out who walks up and down the stairs."

Gaspard clenched his teeth, caught Bertrand by his coat and shook him sharply.

"You must tell me! This minute you must tell me!"

"Mon pauvre Monsieur Debureau, I did not know you took such an interest in latches and doors and beds. I loved you the first time I met you, and imagined we had something in common. I thought that you, like myself, loved poetry and beauty, which is the same thing."

"When did you meet me?" asked Gaspard, surprised.

"At Monsieur Hugo's one evening. He was reading 'Hernani' for the first time. And some other poems. They let me read one of my ballads in prose. But you were certainly asleep and didn't hear."

"I remember. I can't see you very well here, or I should certainly have recognized you. I remember your face—at least I think I remember it. I've an idea they said you were a provincial and gauche. It appealed to me . . ."

"I was gauche, that's why I went back to Dijon. But I've come back to Paris now."

"What are you looking for?"

"Fame or poverty."

"Perhaps," said Gaspard—the old, different Gaspard without his make-up—"perhaps we really have something in common. We must meet some time, tomorrow, perhaps. Won't you come to the theater?"

"I've no money, Monsieur."

"Do come. I invite you. And please forgive me for my behavior this evening."

"Monsieur Debureau, I have the greatest respect for you. But don't forget that whatever you do, you don't find love in kisses."

"Where shall I find it, then?"

"In an old, faded flower, in ashes—or in dreams, when the rain falls and the snow. In the past or the future. But the most sacred oath does not guarantee it you in the present."

"Thank you, Monsieur Bertrand," said Debureau quietly. "Man is a weak creature, and when he is disappointed in something that he trusted . . ."

"Trust the wind and the poplar tree and you will never be disappointed."

"My life isn't poetry."

"But you give poetry to others, that is how I see it. Au revoir, Monsieur Debureau."

"Good night."

He went in, undressed and lay down. For a time it was quiet. Then there was a sound of sobbing; Désirée was crying. Gaspard put out his hand to her across the sleeping child.

"Darling—"

"To say it tonight . . ." she sobbed, "when I wanted to tell you we're going to have another baby."

Gaspard was filled with pity and affection. He jumped up and went and knelt by her bed.

"Forgive me, ma chérie, forgive me."

"Shall we have enough to keep him?" whispered Désirée through her tears.

"Yes, and five more besides, if they're all such actors as the first," he comforted her and stroked her shoulder tenderly.

He whispered comforting and forgiving words to her till he was sure that she had gone to sleep. But he could not get to sleep himself for a long time. He did not believe her. No, he was convinced that Désirée was deceiving him. He could forgive her that.

But whose was the child?

Next evening Gaspard went into the common dressing room again.

"Just think, I'm going to have another baby."

"Sapristi, you're in a hurry . . ." laughed Laurent.

But the others only smiled mockingly. Gaspard wanted to take them by the throat as he had Aloysius Bertrand the night before, and force the truth from them. He was sure what it would be and he wanted to know the name. But that meant confessing his shame and laying himself open to ridicule. It was perhaps the last sensitive spot left in poor Pierrot who was covered elsewhere with old scars which were better able to withstand attack. He

would rather have denied what he saw in his own eyes. His bad temper and exasperation continued unchanged all the evening.

But when he left the theater and met his new friend, his face cleared.

"How did you like it?"

"Monsieur Debureau, that is how I've always seen you in my mind. You are a magician. You are Art personified."

"Why?"

"Your good and wicked expressions are like Art, who has two faces at the same time: there is heaven in one and hell in the other."

"You have too high an opinion of me. All I do is to make poor folk forget for a little what a bad business life is."

"But you give us poets inspiration. Look!" And he pulled some papers from his pocket.

"What's that?"

"A ballad written during a performance at the Théâtre des Funambules."

"You make me very happy. Won't you tell me something about yourself?"

"Ah, non, Monsieur, why should I spoil your evening with tears?"

"Whose tears?"

"Mine, Monsieur, and yours for me!"

"Hasn't even Debureau been able to cure you?" smiled Gaspard.

"You have given me some rare moments. You lifted me up into dreams. Unfortunately, I'm not alone. I write my ballads and poems in prose, Monsieur, but weighing me down like a heavy stone is the thought: What's to become of my mother and sister?"

"Haven't they faith in your talent?"

"Mais oui, Monsieur. They believe in me blindly. And what am I to give them when I've thought a thousand times that I should go mad with grief and want. If I undid my coat you'd see that my shirt only reaches to below the first button. I've got the rest in my shoes instead of socks. We're in great straits, Monsieur. Forgive me—you shouldn't have asked."

"And have you no hope here? No friends?"

"I write letters—people promise things—I've visited one or two patrons—if I were alone I shouldn't care, but I have these two women to think about. Mon Dieu, it breaks my heart that

they should be in such want. I'd cheerfully die for them, but how would that help them?"

"You remind me of my own life not so very long ago," said Gaspard, "and I might read you an improving lecture the refrain of which would be, Don't lose heart! But that wouldn't help you. I want to help you another way."

They stopped before the door of the house where they both lived. Bertrand leaned against the wall. His eyes, the eyes of a poet or a madman, gleamed as they came to rest on Gaspard.

"I want to give you money—or lend it," said Gaspard slowly. "But I want you to do something in exchange."

"I'll do anything for you if you'll help me to give my mother and sister a decent meal—anything if only I needn't feel their pitiful lives as a perpetual reproach."

"I'm going to give you fifty francs," said Gaspard, taking out a note. "The thing I want you to do for me will seem to you revolting, but I promise you you won't be in any way lowered in my eyes."

Bertrand made an abrupt movement. He had guessed.

"But you're lowering yourself in mine, Monsieur Debureau."

"Have pity, Bertrand. It's torturing me to death. I give you my sacred word I won't hurt anyone—I won't take any steps at all. But I must know. Don't leave me in torment."

"I understand you," said Bertrand violently, "but you're humiliating me—making me do a monstrous thing." And he covered his face with his arm.

Debureau stuffed the note into his pocket with a swift movement.

"Who is it?"

Bertrand shuddered as though a skeleton hand had touched him, and with his elbow still covering his face he answered:

"A fan painter in this street. He's been at your house every evening since I've lived here."

Both were silent.

They went slowly up the stairs. Each felt ashamed before the other. The moonlight streamed in as it had yesterday.

"No," Bertrand said quietly after a little. "Life is like Art. And we two have just shown the other face—the one with hell in it. May the night forgive us!"

They separated without shaking hands. Two keys grated in two doors.

## JANIN'S BOOK

IT was April 1833.

George Sand was giving a little dinner for her friends. Nothing official, just a little gathering of witty men whose only preoccupation at the moment was to mystify each other.

Who was there seated round the table? That round face with gentle features and benevolent eyes, the dark hair giving it a southern look—that was Victor Hugo. Beside him a man with close-cropped hair, a bold glance and thoughtful lines at the corners of his mouth—Balzac. Then a mulatto type with thick black hair, tall and thin—Dumas. A butterfly with a red waistcoat, green trousers and a gray coat—that was Gautier, of course. Then two journalists from the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and finally the two guests who are obviously the most important: the philosopher Lerminier, a professor at the Sorbonne, and an English member of Parliament who—so Professor Lerminier has been told—is on his way through France to Austria with secret messages of state for Lord Gray.

The Englishman was dressed in faultless black clothes with a heavy cravat at his neck. He arrived late, as was fitting in an important diplomat, he sat beautifully upright and remained so almost the whole evening; he hardly spoke a word, only bowed occasionally and murmured something when Professor Lerminier tried to draw him into conversation. In vain the best political ideas were developed before him, in vain the others spoke to him of Peel, of young Stanley. There was no response. The important English diplomat, his chin hidden in his stock, was as silent as the Sphinx.

They waited a long time for de Musset, but he did not come, unpunctual as always. Dinner was served without waiting for him, so as not to offend the distinguished Englishman. The bewitching hostess, who dispensed witticisms and food at the same time and circulated wine and good humor, was aided by a young Normandy peasant girl with a gold cross at her bare throat, a bright, pretty little thing but terribly clumsy. If she was asked

for a knife she was sure to bring a plate; if anyone asked her for wine she did not fail to spill it over him as she poured it out.

Conversation turned from the political field to the artistic. They discussed the sad fate of the most famous of the singers at the Opéra, who had been hurt by a fall from horseback and seemed likely to die, and the new hope of the French stage, the young actress Rachel.

"I know for a fact," said Dumas, "that only last year she was singing in the streets of Lyons, but she caught a chill and lost her voice. Now she wants to become an actress."

"It isn't enough—to want to."

"She'll do it too. You'll see, in a couple of years the whole theatrical world will be at her feet."

"How's Debureau these days?" said Gautier suddenly. "Do you know him, Professor?"

"I saw him once," said Lerminier, "and liked him very much. But this obviously does not interest our distinguished guest," and he turned politely to the Englishman. "I wanted to ask you, Excellency, whether you are of my opinion, that the balance of power in Europe has now reached such perfection that we can expect a long period of peace?"

The professor did not see Sand wink at the Englishman and he waited anxiously for an answer. This time he certainly got one.

"The balance of power in Europe?" said the Englishman in his bad French, without relaxing the stiffness of his carriage. "European politics—that is to say English and French—are undergoing powerful influences. Their equilibrium—to put it clearly—is like this . . ." To the professor's immense surprise and horror he picked up a plate and threw it into the air. But before it fell he caught it in its flight on a knife, and the plate spun round on its own center of gravity, supported by the point of the knife.

"There's your European balance, Professor! Voilà!" And he bowed like an actor finishing his turn.

All the company burst out laughing at that.

And Gaspard Debureau, the famous Gaspard Debureau from the Funambules, laid aside his wig and beard and smiled at the astonished professor. But Lerminier was a good fellow who could appreciate a joke in spite of his learning, and admire the faultless acting beneath it.

"I thought you only acted Pierrot."

"But Pierrot is everything, he is in all men, even an English member of Parliament, so he must be able to imitate them all."

"Good," smiled the professor. "But you didn't take me in with one thing, friends." He went up to the maid and pinched her cheek.

"Ow!"

"It's no good your disguising yourself, Alfred." Lerminier smiled and the others with him. "I might have failed to recognize you in that dress and with those red cheeks. But you must give up drinking absinthe. That's what gave you away."

De Musset took off his disguise.

"It isn't given to us all to be Debureau," he said sadly.

That was the end of the play acting and they all began to talk. Alfred sat down beside George, a remarkable pair. He: thin, delicate, ruddy-haired, dark-eyed; she: brown-eyed with olive skin and wavy black hair.

"All the emotional vibrations are in every human being," declared de Musset. "It is the poet's task to discover them, reveal them."

"How lovely it is to go flying after a thought," said George. "And suddenly you catch it and can feel it quivering, alive, under your hand."

"Often I am startled," said Victor Hugo, "when I look back on a thought. It is so simple, I'm astonished I never found it before. They must be all round me, everywhere."

"Yes, truth is in nature."

"Not at all, in my opinion," declared Gautier. "The basis of poetry is not truth."

"What is it, then?"

"The yearning for beauty."

"For our own truth, then, by which we appreciate beauty."

"Perhaps. But I don't love what is natural," insisted Gautier doggedly. "On the contrary, I love what is artificial. Perfumes, rouge and powder, dyes. Debureau is artificial, too. That's why I love him."

"Do you only love the artificial in him?" asked Hugo. "There's more in him that's natural."

"Messieurs," George silenced them, "it is not for us to discuss this. Someone else, a master of his calling, has decided it for us." She brought forward a peculiar bell-shaped glass cover, under which lay a book wrapped up in a parcel. "I ask you all to be witnesses that I here give to Monsieur Debureau an honora-



rium for his special performance today at the private theater of Aurora Dudevant." She lifted the glass cover and handed the parcel to Gaspard, who unwrapped it with trembling fingers. It was a book, and on its cover page was printed in large letters:

DEBUREAU.

"Debureau . . ." Gaspard read. His own name on the grayish-green cover, and under it: *Histoire du Théâtre à Quatre Sous*. By Jules Janin. Published by Charles Gosselin.

With trembling fingers he turned a page.

That was himself: Bouquet's portrait: Debureau as Pierrot. A thick page divided the book in two and over this page, at the beginning of the second part was another picture: Debureau as a cobbler, in one of his character studies. The book had more than three hundred pages.

Gaspard was afraid to open it and read a single line of it. A book about himself! Three hundred pages of it! Was it possible to write three hundred pages of a book like this about his Pierrot and his poor, bleak life? He had only had a few talks with Janin and had not expected the book so soon. Indeed, George Sand, this was the most lovely reward.

"You haven't looked at the dedication."

Ah, here it was.

"To my favorite actor, Gaspard Debureau—with deep esteem, this book—Jules Janin."

"I begged Janin to give it to me for you, so that I could give it you myself," she explained.

And the tall, dark Englishman sat down at the table with the book, still afraid to look inside it. He was sorry he was not alone with it. He did not know how to behave. But the others made things easier for him; they understood how he felt and tried to put him at his ease.

"May I see?" asked Balzac. He took the book and turned over the pages. "Introduction—why this book was written—newspaper articles, inquiries, interest—criticism of the French stage—praise of the slums—"

"That will arouse envy, hatred and malice!"

"Everyone will admit he's right! Here we have a biographical sketch, we're all curious about that, I'm sure— Yes, here we are! 'The greatest comedian of our times, Jean Gaspard Debureau, was born at Novy Kolin.'"

"Aren't you a Frenchman?" some of them asked, surprised.

"It goes on: 'Debureau is the last and greatest gift saved for us by the vagabond kingdom of Bohemia, a kingdom well-known in the Middle Ages, full of merry, restless actors, pretty, light-footed girls, a Bohemian world which laughs when the whole of Europe is weeping, a world of joy, freedom and good cooking, provocative songs and lawless joys, a world of chance which goes, harnessed to the ancient car of Thespis, from place to place . . .'"

"That's not true!" thundered Debureau and thumped the table with his fist.

"Then you *are* French?" asked the professor.

"No," said Debureau, almost in tears, "but I'm not a gypsy either. Why has he said that?" In his marble face was great emotion. "He should have asked me. He shouldn't have been in such a hurry!" he cried. "I told him about Bohemia!"

"How long did you live in your native country?"

"Only eight years."

"Perhaps you don't know it very well. Janin has obviously been looking it up."

"He's got it all wrong. I didn't live long in my country, but I've talked to Czechs who have come over here, soldiers, travelers. My country isn't a bit like that."

"Is Bohemia on the Danube?" asked de Musset.

"No. It's on the Elbe. But I know for a fact it's not a merry nation of light girls, a nation that laughs when all Europe is weeping. It's a lie! A lie!" He was dreadfully unhappy. "My people are religious—I can remember the churches. And they're serious. And they don't drag any car from place to place. They're farmers. My people—" he had a sudden inspiration how to bring it home to them—"They're something like the Poles. They want their liberty—they aren't free—they're under Austria. But the people speak Czech, not German."

"Then Janin seems to have made a mistake," Balzac tried to excuse it, "but it will certainly be easy to have that altered. I'm sure you'll be pleased with the book otherwise. There are some fine passages further on—about your childhood, the journey to Amiens, arrival in Paris, early days at the Funambules—and here's a bit about your having wanted to commit suicide . . ."

"Let me see!"

Not all of it, happily. Only as far as the brasserie A l'Ours Blanc. After that came something about Talma. Gaspard was pacified. That was all right. There was nothing about his jump into the Seine. Gaspard returned the book to Balzac.

"And here's a most witty account of your acting. Yes, it's certainly true." And he began to read aloud, nodding his head.

Gaspard did not dare to raise his eyes while the others were praising Janin's style and his courageous, truthful words.

"Here's something about your contracts—there's one given in full—then about the lawsuit—the whole plot of the Golden Eggs—a list of the properties at your theater . . ."

"That'll do," said Gaspard.

"Wait a minute, what's this? 'Answers to inquisitive readers. What furniture has he got? Six chairs, a sofa, a writing desk . . .'"

Everybody smiled.

"Special accomplishments: he can fasten a picture on a wall. What does he like to drink? Warm wine and beer, tea, coffee with rum. What does he hate? The nightingale.'"

"I had to tell him something," Debureau excused himself. "Don't read any more, please."

"Quick! Prepare some warm wine, beer, tea, coffee and rum!" cried George Sand.

"Now about your family life," Balzac read on the last page. "Debureau lives with his wife . . ."

There was a knock at the door. De Musset went quickly and opened it. It was a thin, brown man in shabby clothes. Only Gaspard knew him: Aloysius Bertrand.

"Debureau, please come home at once."

"What's happened?"

"Your wife's worse. They've sent for you . . ."

And the tall English diplomat snatched the book from Balzac's hands, bowed deeply without a word, and hurried out. Words of sympathy were called after him, but the only reply was the sound of hurrying steps on the stairs.

Debureau sat beside Bertrand in the fiacre, driving through the streets at top speed.

"Tell me what's happened."

"Your wife's worse. She called us, and we went for the doctor. He examined her and sent for you, that's all."

"But why? Why? What did my wife say?"

"Nothing, she only groaned."

"Whose name did she call?"

"No one's."

Love had vanished from Gaspard's heart in the last few

days. When he heard of her unfaithfulness, he thought he would go mad and kill the adulterer and Désirée with him. In vain Bertrand urged him to take it philosophically. "Ah, mon cher, where's the wife who won't be unfaithful to you? You have a treasure, someone steals it—eh bien, go without supper and buy her a bunch of violets." It was no use. Gaspard was raging mad. The fiercest thoughts of revenge vied with each other in his heart. "You've lost her heart, but you can keep her soul," Bertrand told him, "you have a place there, keep it."

He said it to him so often and with such emphasis during their nightly walks about Paris that Gaspard believed him.

"Why aren't you as magnanimous in real life as you are on the stage? Why have you so little understanding of human weakness, when on the stage you only punish it with a smile?"

Gaspard struggled with himself a long time. At the theater his friends did not recognize him; he who was usually so quiet flew into a passion at the least thing. He had long ruled the theater without anyone noticing it. His modesty, melancholy and kindness made everyone forget it. But now when he began to throw his powder box across the dressing room, beat the drum until he broke it, and smash plates at the least mistake or misunderstanding, they all realized it for the first time. The sight of young eyes in tears made him resolve to rid himself of his bad temper at all costs.

He was inclined to put more and more trust in Aloysius Bertrand, who said:

"Fate has given you a name which belongs on the stage. The stage is your destiny. Don't let yourself be led astray by life. Be the stage Gaspard in your life."

"I haven't such faith in art as you. I didn't begin by finding out its laws. I went after the people and tried to cheer them up."

"Yes, and so you mustn't be surprised that there are moments when you find yourself alone. It's the purpose of all the Gaspards, even mine."

"But you aren't Gaspard."

"I am at night. I play my scenes to the night, find in her my stage setting and the wings for my entrances. The night is my stage and my auditorium. Will you let me be Gaspard at night?"

"Yes," said Gaspard and drew his companion into a bar. "A ta santé. Don't say vous to me, please."

"A ta santé."

This was the third friendship that Gaspard Debureau made.

He wanted to believe his new friend and he believed him when he said that what one lived was not the chief and most important thing, but the secret longing hidden in the soul.

"She's unfaithful to you? But look how her hair gleams when you come home and the stars shine in through the window! How the breath trembles on her lips and the fear in her heart! Look for beauty, not advantage!"

Gaspard took this lesson of beauty to heart. And when Désirée made up her mind to confess everything, he did not make an exclamation or shed a tear. He simply smiled coldly and nodded his head. It did not matter to him now. He had learned to love beauty, but he no longer loved Désirée.

But now that she was with child and ill he remembered that they were both human beings. Her sufferings brought him back to earth again and made him conscious of her feelings. For a week he had hardly noticed her, completely indifferent to her existence. But when she lay moaning he turned to her with eyes full of alarm, forgot his revenge and his coldness, and trembled for her health.

It was like that now. She was worse! Mon Dieu! Was she going to die? The fiacre seemed to crawl like a snail.

He shot up the stairs like lightning and fell beside her bed.

Her face lay on the pillow, pale, serious, robbed of its frivolous prettiness. But how much more dear she was to him and how much more beautiful with these gray shadows under her eyes and on her cheeks!

"Ma chérie," he whispered and kissed her burning hot hands. A gleam of happiness came into her eyes.

"I'm ill," she whispered.

"I know, darling, but don't be afraid. We'll get you well again."

Bertrand's sister came over to him.

"Dr. Brantome has been here. He thinks your wife ought to go to a hospital. And he says in any case—she won't be able to have the baby."

Gaspard could not help the spasm of joy which shot across his face. That cruel child which he feared as a witness to her betrayal and her sin—the world would never see it! There was something cruel, diabolical, in his joy. He realized this, but at the same time he knew that this trouble wiped out the evil past. It would have been so terrible to have a child among them who was not his own. They would never have been happy.

"But," he remembered suddenly, "won't it be dangerous?"

Mademoiselle Bertrand gave a little shrug. Désirée moved her head slightly so that she could look straight into her husband's face.

"I shall be glad," she said softly, "for you—and for our son."

"And you—won't you be very sorry?"

"I shall be glad," she repeated.

She looked so pathetic, lying helpless on her pillows. Her hair was limp and the curls had come out, but to Gaspard she had never looked prettier. She was his own again! It reminded him of the happiest time of all, when he had come stealing round to her house in secret and they had lived their first day of love together above the scented gardens of the Luxembourg.

She gave a moan of pain.

"Hush, hush," he begged. "Don't be frightened. It'll all be better soon. We shall be lovers as we were at first. You'll be my own little Désirée again—and we shall have no one—but just ourselves."

Her eyelashes quivered with contentment and fatigue.

"When I'm in the hospital—you must look after Charles."

"You know I will . . ."

"And there's something else I want to ask you—but . . ." She did not dare to say it. Only her eyes gazed at him pleadingly and slowly filled with tears.

"Tell me, *ma petite*, tell me everything," Gaspard encouraged her. He touched her gently and was alarmed at the heat of her body.

"I'd like . . . for the last time . . ." And she closed her eyes in shame. "For the last time," she repeated earnestly, putting all her shame and all her resolution into her soft, weak voice.

"I know," said Gaspard. "Wait a little. He'll come soon."

He was so sorry for her, poor little sufferer! How heaven was punishing her, filling her with the pains of hell! He would do anything to bring a little light into her darkened eyes. He would bring even his hated enemy to her bedside if she wished it.

He hurried away to the shop. The window was open and beside it sat the young fan painter. His paints and brushes were spread out round him and he was painting on the delicate, lace-like slips of wood. Gaspard stood still and looked at his bent head and sensitive hands. A handsome fellow, he admitted. He himself had not a face like that, nor such nimble hands.

The painter saw the broken shadow which fell at his feet. He raised his head. At first sight he did not recognize Gaspard.

"Plait-il, Monsieur?" he asked, smiling politely.

Gaspard stood staring into his eyes and did not answer. His lips were pressed together and his face had an expression of grief and resolution. Suddenly the painter recognized him. He laid down the fan and his brush and repeated his question, but in a different tone. His voice trembled with alarm.

"Plait-il, Monsieur?"

"Don't be alarmed," said Gaspard drily. "My wife is ill, as you doubtless know. She wants you to come and see her."

"No, excuse me, Monsieur, I know nothing about it . . ." The young man's chin was quivering and he cowered back into the room.

"I tell you, you needn't be afraid," Gaspard repeated quietly. "She wants—she wants to say good-by to you. She's going to the hospital."

"I don't know her, Monsieur," stammered the painter.

The blood rushed into Gaspard's face. He began to breathe heavily. This cowardice hit him like an insult. But he controlled himself:

"My wife, Monsieur," he said more loudly, "Désirée—is dangerously ill. She wants to see you before she goes to the hospital. You must comfort her, do you understand? I wish you to."

"Com-comfort her? I?"

"Are you deaf?" cried Gaspard, exasperated. "I forgive you all the wrong you have done me—but hurry up, come to her at once and comfort her! Make her happy! Come quick and talk to her. Smile at her. Do you hear?"

But the foolish young man got more and more frightened. He had edged to the back of the room and seemed to want to run away. Gaspard was filled with fury. What sort of lover was this who had not even the courage to come and press the hand of the woman who might be going to die because of him? Was this the thief who had filched his happiness from him? And was poor Désirée to wait in vain?

"Come with me this instant!" he shouted.

But the painter was at the door already.

"I'm not coming, Monsieur. I don't want to have anything more to do with you—or your wife either. I'm afraid of illness."

That was too much. Gaspard leaned through the window, swept up a handful of whatever came within reach—brushes,

paintpots and fans—and revenged himself on them for the despicable painter. The door slammed. A second later a shower of colors splashed the wooden panels.

It was only after that that Gaspard turned away. A few curious idlers were standing staring at him. He glanced at them angrily and walked away.

"That's him," he heard someone say.

"Who?"

"The clown from the Funambules."

His heart was full of hatred. The clown! Was he a clown now? If he had not been in a hurry he would have given the youth who said it a thrashing. But he must get back to Désirée.

He hurried along. On the way he bought a little bunch of flowers from a flower seller.

Outside his house stood a carriage. He ran quickly up the stairs.

"I've arranged about removing her," the doctor told him, "and I'm waiting for you to pay me."

"In a minute, Doctor," whispered Gaspard. "Is it serious?"

"If we hurry up it'll be all right," replied the doctor.

Gaspard went into the bedroom. Désirée's eyes greeted him with an unhappy look of disappointment and anger. He knelt beside the bed and whispered:

"My dear Désirée, just think what's happened—Monsieur Alban's ill too, he's in bed—no, don't be alarmed, it's nothing serious. They say he'll soon be better—he'll come and see you in the hospital. And he sent you these flowers—and many greetings—and hopes you'll be better soon . . ."

A faint light appeared in her eyes. Her lips smiled and a little color mounted to her cheeks.

"Thank you," whispered Désirée. "It's all right now. He—mustn't come to the hospital. It's all over."

"Yes, sweetheart, just as you like. And shall I come to see you?"

"Oh, yes! yes!"

"I'll come, then. And, darling, please—think of me and little Charles—remember we're here and thinking of you all the time."

"I'm not going to die, don't be afraid . . ."

"Of course not, little silly," said Gaspard, but his voice trembled. "You must get quite well again as quickly as you can. We shall be waiting for you every day. Now come, darling."

The doctor appeared. Everything was done quickly. Two



men with a stretcher carried Désirée out. Gaspard paid the doctor.

"Come tomorrow to the Necker Hospital to inquire."

"I'll come."

He helped them down the stairs with her and saw them put her into the carriage. There was a last sad farewell.

He went wearily upstairs again. Little Charles, now five years old, ran to meet him.

"Daddy, where's Mother going?"

"She's gone out for a drive." He picked the boy up and sat down with him by the window, but he did not hear what the child was saying. He was thinking: How long, how much longer can I bear it—giving, giving all the time—and never being given anything in return?

## XVII

### TWO INVITATIONS

GASPARD was coming home from the hospital. It was Good Friday. Crowds of people streamed along in the direction of the Champs Elysées. The scent of lilacs came from the gardens. Birds sang. Fruit vendors with two-wheeled carts piled high with fruit hurried to take up the best positions. Porters in short blouses and wide trousers tried their luck among the crowd. Heavy omnibuses and elegant coaches wound their way among the people; drays loaded with barrels of beer and spirits rattled along, making the street tremble. There were vans with animal tainers and their beasts, conjurers, savages—all impatient to make a camp and start performing.

Gaspard managed to turn into a side street. The sound of an organ came from somewhere.

"She's better. She's getting on very well," they had told him. He could see for himself that Désirée was brighter. But the tenderness and love had gone from her face. He did not know whether to be glad or sorry.

He had not even been angry when once in delirium she cried out for Alban, and stroked his hand, thinking it was he. He forgave her everything in advance if she would only get well again, if only she could stop suffering.

"Mother's coming home," he said to little Charles, taking him on his knee. "She'll cook some porridge for you—and sing to you. Let's go and see Auntie Annette."

He found some escape in the closer contact with his son. He had never given so much time to him before. He was trying to make up to him now for his mother's absence and really getting to know him for the first time. Charles was slowly reaching the age at which Gaspard could remember his own first childish impressions of the Cathedral at Kolin. He supposed that they were more beautiful in retrospect.

He was finding it very difficult to go on acting. He was getting over his anger and exasperation, but he was inwardly ill at ease, and unhappy. Nothing, however, could stop his advance on

the road to success. Janin's book had stirred up the surface of the theatrical world of Paris as nothing had ever done before. Debureau was a popular catchword, the latest thing in the salons, an article of faith to the public. To know him even distantly was a great honor. "That's him!" he heard behind him more and more often. It gave him a certain consolation, but he did not like it if they still looked on him as a clown even when he was Gaspard Debureau in his ordinary clothes and not Pierrot in his white dress.

He had become the most famous actor in France.

On this Good Friday when he got home from the hospital, two visitors were waiting for him: a man in a magnificent uniform, an officer of the King's guard; and a woman in a common green dress. It was Margot.

"Margot!" he cried, smiling sadly.

She pointed in silence to the officer, but Gaspard took no notice of him.

"How did you find me? Who told you where I live?"

"They told me at the theater. I came to ask you to come to a little child who's ill."

"I?"

"Yes. He's the son of a friend of mine. He's been to the theater with us once and seen you. And now he's ill—very ill, I think—and he keeps on crying and saying he wants to see you. So I thought—if you'd come for just a moment—you'd make him so happy. I wanted to come and see your wife and ask her about it, but they told me she was ill—so perhaps you can't . . ."

"Do you think it would make the little boy happy to see me?"

"Tremendously. And me too. But I hardly like . . ."

"I'll come, Margot. Will you take me there?"

"Monsieur Debureau?" said the officer and clicked his spurs.

"A votre service."

"His Majesty the King is giving an entertainment to the children of Paris today," said the officer. "He has sent me for you urgently, to fetch you to act some scenes to amuse the children."

"I'm sorry, I'm engaged," said Debureau with an apologetic smile.

"Monsieur, I imagine you did not hear me," said the courtier, shocked. "His Majesty . . ."

"I know. But I've just promised to go and see a little boy who's ill. Perhaps I could come to Court another time?"

The officer thought he must be speaking to a madman. If His Majesty—

Margot, who had been listening, interfered now.

"You go there, Gaspard. Poor little Jacques is quiet during the day. It's only at night that he cries and can't go to sleep. Go and give your performance at the Palace—it's for children there, too—and after that you can come on to us. I'll give you the address."

"Just as you please," agreed Gaspard. "And when am I to come to Court?"

"At once, Monsieur. If you like I will drive you to the theater for your costumes and everything you need, and then straight to the Palace."

"All right, call a coach," said Debureau wearily.

Clearly Debureau did not accept the King's invitation in the best of humors.

The King—a bourgeois who carried an umbrella instead of a scepter and walked with it through the streets in shabby clothes—did not enjoy too good a reputation. Debureau would not have blamed him for that if it had been joined to real effort for the good of the people and the country. But it was not possible to observe any such thing. The King may have meant well. He had no foolish ideas about the people's happiness; he wanted actions. He set the example himself. Every other year of the reign an attempt was made on the King's life. But Louis Philippe was always lucky. They were almost small revolutions, but the King always came out of them with a whole skin and even with some work to do—signing a couple of death warrants. And under the sign of the umbrella, the Government went on.

Gaspard did not mind the King carrying an umbrella. He did not care that at every carnival his mask was to be seen, known by the fact that it kept on shaking hands with everyone near it. But Gaspard hated the King for setting an example for shameless profiteering and greed. Behind the Boulevard du Temple stood two new paper mills and a soap factory. In them about two thousand children from Paris and its environs were working. A king who allowed that did not deserve love or respect or fellow feeling.

There were many reasons for a poor man to be furiously dissatisfied with this reign. Thus Debureau did not spring into the air with delight or fly to the Palace on wings of rapture.

He quietly looked out his costumes at the theater and took his place in the fiacre.

"Will there be only children at the Palace?"

"There will also be a small number of selected guests to enjoy . . ."

"The children?"

"No, a production by artists."

Gaspard could imagine the talk at the Court. It can't be helped, they would say, we must show these plebeians that we have their welfare at heart. Let's invite a few children to supper on Good Friday. And we'll get a couple of entertainers so that the ladies and gentlemen aren't too bored.

"Tell me," asked Debureau suddenly, "why have they invited me? As a rule the Opéra furnishes the entertainment."

The officer became confidential:

"A copy of Monsieur Janin's book about you came into His Majesty's hands—and he wanted to meet you."

"So the long and the short of it is that the children are a pretext?"

"Well, to a certain extent."

They reached the Palace. Outside the entrance stood a crowd of youths and ragamuffins to whom five franc pieces had been distributed. Gaspard knew about that. Five francs was the fee for shouting "Vive le Roi!" under the window. If "The Marseillaise" was asked for, they were paid five francs more. It was a sight for the gods when the King showed himself at the window and thanked the "enthusiastic crowd."

In the great hall with wide windows opening onto the park, tables had been set out in a horseshoe shape and seated at them were about two hundred children from middle-class and poor families. Gaspard went past under the gallery, but he saw that the King was sitting in the center of the horseshoe and, as his custom was, distributing food with his own hands to great and small.

"Would you like a leg?" he asked his minister, and carved him a piece of fowl.

Gaspard was taken to a dressing room to put on his costume and make himself up. But he had hardly begun when someone opened the door without knocking and the King came in.

"So you're here already."

Gaspard jumped up, the hare's foot in one hand and a wig in the other, and bowed.

"Don't let me disturb your operations. The children are looking forward to seeing you."

Debureau put down his wig and took the proffered hand.

"I read Monsieur Janin's book. That is to say, I haven't read it, but I have seen it. It interests me. They won't let me go to your theater, so I have had to ask you here. The children are all agog and so am I."

The King spoke easily but not quickly, and it was clear from each word how selfish he was and how self-satisfied.

"I am afraid, Sire, that I shall not be able to give you a complete picture of a performance at our theater—I'm here alone . . ."

"It was chiefly you I wanted to see. Tell me, what do you think of the progress in my reign? Has the Boulevard du Temple got pavements yet?"

"Not yet, Sire."

"I must see about that. And gaslight?"

"No, Sire."

"Why not?"

"I imagine, Sire," said Debureau politely, "that these hygienic innovations are introduced in the rich quarters, not in the poor ones."

"Ah," said the King. "They tell me that there are fewer people there."

Debureau shook his head. "They were almost exterminated last year by the cholera."

"Really?"

"It was awful, Sire."

"The people behaved very badly," said the King. "They smashed up the Archbishop's palace, dressed up in the vestments and danced in them—"

"They were almost mad, Sire. I thought I should go mad myself. It was carnival time, Your Majesty will please to remember. I saw people die in their masks in the street—Pierrots among them."

"Why are you telling me this?" snapped the King.

"Pardon, Your Majesty," said Debureau with a bow, "I thought you wanted news of the progress in our quarter."

"Quite right, quite right," said the King with a wave of his hand. "But today you are here to perform and not to give us news. No, no, I'm not angry," he went on reassuringly. "I will

have all that put right. You admit that it's beautiful to invite all these children here."

Gaspard had on the tip of his tongue a bitter reproach about the thousands of children worked to death in the factories. But he knew that it was no use. Besides, he did not want to be put in prison. He had to go and see Margot and the little boy who was ill. And there was Désirée tomorrow.

The King left him. Gaspard finished getting ready and waited. Presently he was called in.

He reached the podium with a series of somersaults. His young audience received him with delighted applause. Thrown on his own resources, Gaspard only acted a few of his solo scenes. The most applause was given to his impersonation of a guitarist who has broken a string and is tying it up again—without a guitar, of course, and without a string—and then the tailor sewing a button on a coat—again without needle or thread. But his mimicry was so convincing that it roused roars of laughter.

Towards the end he noticed a disturbance among the children, and because he did not find the company a very congenial audience, he ended his turn. The King bowed gracefully as much as to say: I am satisfied. But at the door, the officer who had conducted him there said to him:

"Such a dreadful thing. The master of the ceremonies did not know that the guests were to be children. He ordered iced punch. The children drank it off at once and now they're being sick."

"That's a nice way to look after children!" exclaimed Gaspard.

He wiped his make-up off quickly and changed his clothes. He did not intend to stay. But his guide made him sit down among the thinning ranks of children and have some supper. The King would be angry if he did not! The children who were not taken ill, gallantly faced the long program made up of the usual songs by operatic artists. Debureau had just finished his meal as a pair of singers were ending their duet, when suddenly their voices wavered. Looking closer he saw them turn pale and saw the woman clutch at the curtain so as not to faint. Through the half-opened windows came distinctly the refrain of an anti-royalist song:

"C'est notre roi po—po—  
Po—po—populaire!"

And immediately after it a harsh, determined voice and a clatter of arms.

"Shut the windows!" someone shouted.

The singers tried to go on, but they had lost their time and one was a couple of beats behind the other. Debureau raised his head and listened. Among the hired ragamuffins there were obviously a group of malcontents who had crept across the grass and come to give the King a concert under his windows. The singers tried in vain to drown them with their duet.

"Mort aux aristos!" The words came perfectly clearly. And like a note of exclamation came the crash of broken glass as the windows were broken by a shower of stones. The children began to cry and whimper, but no one paid any attention to them. Attendants and guests hurried from the room in alarm.

"Where are the hussars?" Gaspard heard the King shout excitedly. "Chartres! Where are your hussars?"

"They are already intervening, Your Majesty."

"Nothing must happen to the children," muttered the King.

Gaspard looked out of the window. The glare of the torches lit up bayonets and gold-laced uniforms. The soldiers were driving the people out of the park. A few shots rang out. Gaspard clenched his teeth. They were firing again unnecessarily. And even if they fired all the cartridges in the King's armory, it would not help them.

"Go on," he said to the singers.

"To your places," someone called.

But Gaspard's place was empty already. This kind of thing was not for him. And his appearance before King Louis Philippe was the worst performance he ever gave.

In a dark little vestibule he flung on his white dress and put on his Pierrot cap.

"Just you watch," said Margot to the sick child who had bad pain in all his limbs, "just you watch and you'll see Pierrot whom you liked so much that time . . ."

The boy fixed his eyes on the door and forgot to cry. His mother, Margot's friend, put her arm firmly round his shoulders, so that he should not be frightened. The door opened and Pierrot stood there.

"How lovely he is!"

"Good evening, little boy!" said Pierrot with a bow. And he began to dance. Round the table he went, jumping over the chairs,



till he stood beside the bed. He stumbled, almost fell—but saved himself at the last minute. The little boy laughed for the first time since he had been ill. Pierrot stumbled again, but still he was standing on his feet. Little Jacques watched him with shining eyes. What a heavenly apparition it was in the poor little room where there was usually only cold and darkness. Glorious, white Pierrot! The boy did not cry now; he laughed joyfully. His mother clenched her teeth so as not to sob aloud in her joy and gratitude—and Margot, who remained standing by the door, followed Pierrot with melting eyes of wonder as if he were a demigod.

Gaspard paused for a moment, out of breath. Margot was going up to him to thank him, but little Jacques held out beseeching hands and whispered like a prayer:

"Oh, please, please go on . . ."

Pierrot went on. He picked up a chair and did not know how to sit down on it. He got all tangled up in it and finally stood on his head and the chair sat on him. The boy's laughter was like the heart-rending cry of a bird, and his aching throat emitted shouts of delighted rapture. Pierrot acted the scene of the tailor. Then he moved his ears. He made all the grimaces of which his face was capable. Then he danced again, and after that he stood on his head.

"Darling Pierrot!" whispered the child lovingly and held out his arms to him.

Gaspard went close and Jacques took his sleeve in his small hands reverently, but with an intimate touch, as he might have taken some lovely expensive doll. He stroked the white sleeve and held it against his cheek and forehead. His eyes shone as though lit by some fire from within.

"How happy he is!" whispered his mother.

"Oh, Mother!" cried the boy. "It was lovely! I feel so comfy!" The tired little head sank back on the pillows. "I shall dream about him," murmured the childish lips.

"Yes," whispered Pierrot, "and I'll come again tomorrow."

The boy simply nodded with a look of inexpressible happiness.

Margot led Gaspard out quietly and helped him take off his Pierrot dress.

"You've made him tremendously happy."

"But I'm acting at the theater tomorrow. I shan't be able to come," said Gaspard anxiously.

"The doctor says he won't live till tomorrow."

"That's dreadful."

"Whatever happens, you've made him so happy, perhaps he'll die more easily. We're both eternally grateful to you."

The boy's mother came out—a girl no older than Margot—and pressed his hand without a word.

"You're so good," Margot told him again.

Gaspard went home again, taking with him the happy certainty that he had after all done something useful today, done at least a little good. Désirée was almost well again, perhaps he would be able to bring her home tomorrow. With this hope in his heart he climbed the stairs to his door. Close to it he stumbled over something and a figure rose from the floor. It was Bertrand, the young poet.

"So here you are."

"Yes. What are you doing here?"

"I was waiting for you."

"Why?"

"I wanted to have a little stroll with you."

"At this time of night?"

"Yes."

"All right," said Gaspard. "We'll go, then." He laid his costume on the window sill, but suddenly, as if a star had fallen and its light had shown him something, he turned sharply and caught Bertrand by the coat.

"What do you want to tell me?" he asked feverishly.

"I'll tell you outside."

But the floor was rocking under Gaspard's feet.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

"No."

Gaspard gave a sigh of relief. "What's happened, then?"

"Come outside, Gaspard," said the poet gently, putting an arm round his shoulders. "Come outside with me, into the night. I've so much to talk to you about tonight—"

"Tell me about Désirée!"

"They let her out of the hospital this evening."

"She came home?"

"Yes. She packed up her things—and brought the boy to us."

"Where has she gone?"

"The fan painter was waiting for her downstairs. They drove away together."

"She's run away from me," laughed Debureau with the quiet chuckle of a madman. "My wife's run away! She's run away—my wife!"

They went down the stairs. The night welcomed them with its calm darkness.

XVIII

LA DAME AUX CAMELIAS

A new play was to be acted in the Boulevard du Temple.

TONIGHT

Au Grand Théâtre des Funambules

by special permission of the authorities

on October 21, 1840,

an exceptionally magnificent performance

THE RAG SELLER

a Pantomime in Two Acts

by

M. CITO D'ARDANA and JEAN GASPARD DEBUREAU.

The theater was full. In the boxes, Victor Hugo was joking with George Sand. Alfred de Musset was not there. After his parting from his mistress he had tried to commit suicide; he recovered, but only to fall into a series of fevers and nervous crises, between alcohol and rapture, which dulled his pain and hastened the fatal heart disease. Théophile Gautier and Gérard de Nerval were there, however. And the parterre, of course, was full of working people. The men took off their coats. There was laughter, chatter, singing.

The performance of the new play was a great success. Théophile Gautier wrote about it the next day in the *Revue de*

*Paris*, echoing once more the admiration and praise the people of Paris had for their Pierrot.

As Gaspard came into his dressing room that night, he saw a bunch of lilies of the valley lying on his table.

"Always women," the actor Laplace smiled at him.

"You know I don't give them a thought."

"But they do you."

"That's not the same thing. I simply want them to leave me in peace."

"You'll need plenty of resolution to achieve that. At least you know who they're from?"

"I've no idea."

"You'll find out after the play."

"Pff! You know my system."

Since the theater had been rebuilt there was an extra exit. Debureau used it when he was afraid some woman was waiting for him. He was not interested in any of them; he had a son and he did not want another woman. There was no one whom he could have loved, so why should he waste his time on them? He had no use for sighs, tears and vows; he wanted none of the trumpery of beauty whose reverse side was so vulgar.

He never looked into the boxes now, though there were often famous beauties in them who might have been proud to count Gaspard among their lovers.

That evening, too, at that grand first night, actors and especially the actresses were consumed with curiosity and kept on peering through a chink in the curtain all through the performance. But it was not George Sand who riveted their attention.

"She's lovely!" cried the young Clara.

"No, she's too glaring," Justine criticized her.

"She? Why, she's always dressed in exquisite taste."

"Perhaps. Who knows who pays for it!"

"You'd accept it too if you had the chance!"

"Who's there?" Laplace asked them.

"She is."

"Who's *she*?"

"Marie Duplessis. The most adored woman in Paris."

"Tonnerre! Let me look!"

He stuck his face close to the chink. "Diable! What a woman! Those black eyes—and so sweet! And such eyebrows!

And diamonds in her hair! Nom de Dieu! Come and look, Gaspard!"

"What for?" Gaspard waved his hand.

"Enemy of women!" exclaimed Mme. Rébard, who played the Duchess in the new play.

"I'm so much in love on the stage, I've nothing left for real life."

"You'll be sorry for that one of these days, Debureau!"

"I have been already."

"Don't you look, Debureau," Justine advised him, "it's just some silly young miss—she's hardly seventeen."

"And already Paris is hers!"

"They say she has consumption, if you want to know."

"Poor woman," said Clara pityingly.

When the play ended, everyone backstage knew it was a sensational success. Bertrand counted his money with his head in a whirl. The actors strutted like peacocks. Only Gaspard drooped when the curtain fell and went spiritlessly back to his dressing room.

He opened the door. In the center of the room stood a slim young girl dressed in black, with brilliants in her hair and ears. She was dazzlingly beautiful; but not a proud, statuesque beauty. Her glance was kindly, gracious, warm. Her eyes were her most beautiful feature: lively, startled, restless, full of innocence and yet they contained a certain air of mystery. The arched eyebrows above them were as fine as if etched on a clear forehead. Her figure was slender and delicate. At her waist were a few camélias.

She did not move, but only smiled with gracious, enchanting lips.

"Vous voulez, Madame?" asked Gaspard, astonished, but in his voice there was already the determination not to look at her.

"I wanted to meet you," she said, and Gaspard did not know whether she spoke loud or whispered, her voice was so warm and dreamlike.

"At your service." Debureau bowed, as much as to say: Here I am, have a good look at me . . .

The girl came a step nearer, her brilliants scintillating, a cloud of perfume drifting from her, and her voice sounding like a fairy song.

"I should so like to hear you talk since I've seen how wonderfully you can keep silence." It was prettily said. Debureau became a degree less abrupt.

"Here?"

"No," she said with a smile. "I asked about you and the ouvreuse warned me of the second exit. I did not want to have my wait for nothing, so I came to make sure of you. . . ."

"That was very witty."

"Promise you won't run away from me?" She held out a beautiful white hand.

"I promise," said Gaspard, fascinated, chiefly because he felt a sudden yearning to take the hand in his. He touched it as if it were something sacred.

"Thanks! I'll wait for you in my carriage. You won't keep me waiting long?"

Adventure had Gaspard in its grip, adventure which he had avoided so long and of which he was so timid.

"Only a moment," he assured her. "And thanks for your flowers."

"Flowers?" asked the girl, surprised. "I never sent you any."

"I beg your pardon." Gaspard was embarrassed. "I thought . . ."

"No, it wasn't I. Au revoir."

As soon as she had gone out Gaspard flung himself down before his mirror and tore off his costume; he was sorry he had only two hands. Some of the other actors came crowding in; envy had taken the place of curiosity this time.

"Who was she, Gaspard?"

"I don't know."

"She was a beauty if you like! Wasn't she the Duplessis?"

"She didn't say. I've no idea."

"You're going to meet her, Gaspard. Aren't you?"

"Can't you see I'm in a hurry?"

"What price your principles now?"

"This case is the exception!"

He was dressed. Just a dab with the brush, a hint of perfume, one last look in the glass . . .

"Debureau, may I come in?" Mme. Rébard knocked at the door.

"Certainly."

"Why, you're ready and I haven't even begun."

"I'm in a hurry."

Mme. Rébard came into the room.

"I wondered if you would come along with the rest of us to celebrate the occasion."

"Hélas . . ."

She put her hand on his shoulder. "It was a glorious evening, Debureau. Won't you—or perhaps you'd like to come out and have supper somewhere—with me?"

"With you?" Gaspard looked at her, surprised. "Really, I'm awfully sorry . . ."

"What a pity. We don't often have an evening like this, and the night . . ."

"Please forgive me, I really can't."

Mme. Rébard shrugged her shoulders and went slowly to the door. Gaspard had a sudden idea.

"Thank you, Madame, for your flowers."

"My flowers?" She turned her head. "We were talking about supper, not flowers."

"I'm sorry," Gaspard excused himself. "Someone's sent me some and I don't know who, so I thought . . ."

"Nonsense," cried Mme. Rébard angrily and slammed the door after her.

There. Gaspard was ready. Ah, someone had come into his life at last. Tonight, after all these gray, dreary, terrible days. He would live for a moment at least.

He took the little bunch of lilies of the valley with him. On the way he paused to speak to the ouvreuse.

"Why did you give away the secret of the second exit?" he asked her, frowning. It was the same ouvreuse whose tears had once saved his career from extinction and who followed him day by day with a fascinated gaze. She had grown older, too, since the night when Gérard and Picard had tried to comfort her as she told them of Gaspard's poverty. The years had passed, but her heart was faithful.

"I'm sorry, Monsieur Debureau," she whispered, alarmed. "I thought . . ."

Debureau frowned. He's going to smash something now, thought the girl— But suddenly he smiled as she had not seen him smile for a long, long time, and said happily:

"It's all right—I'm not cross with you, quite the contrary! And if you don't believe me—here!" And he pressed the bunch of lilies of the valley into her hand.

With a cheerful good night he hurried along the passage and disappeared. And while the hoarse cries of coachmen and the grinding of wheels drifted in from outside, the poor ouvreuse murmured:



"He didn't understand!" And she pressed her own bunch of flowers to her breast.

Boulevard de la Madeleine, No. 11. The girl unlocked the door. Gaspard followed her, holding his breath. He had stepped into a fairy tale.

A large anteroom, walled with white lattice from which fell creeping plants. A salon decorated in oak with embossed arabesques in gold. A large fireplace with a Venetian mirror opposite. Curtains of purple velvet with fringes of gold. A crystal luster filled with candles. Japanese plates in a glass cabinet.

Gaspard's eyes fell on one object then another, from wall to wall, and his wonder increased. In whose house was he? Who was this girl of seventeen, living in luxury, the like of which he had not seen even at the Palace? And there was such taste in everything, down to the most delicate details.

"Do sit down." An armchair covered with Chinese silk in cherry color and white.

"I'm so surprised," admitted Debureau. "I didn't know I was coming to a palace."

"Do you like my home? And you'll talk to me a lot, won't you?"

"Why do you take an interest in me?"

"Do you expect a lady to confess her admiration?"

"That's not much explanation of why I come to find myself here."

She poured wine into crystal glasses.

"I wanted to have Pierrot all to myself—and to hear him talk."

"Pierrot is only Pierrot because he understands how to listen and learn. He doesn't know how to talk."

"Your melancholy intoxicates me like a heavy wine."

"A melancholy clown. What does that mean to a lady like you?"

She looked at him without answering. The innocence vanished from her eyes, they were all mystery now. Her lips trembled as if the secret would slip through them. Deep flames burned in her eyes. Gaspard bent forward to look into them and she met his gaze. He rose and faced her. A hot hand seized him and he went towards her. Her breath burned like a strong perfume.

"What it means?" she said, hardly moving her lips, her intoxicating eyes quite close to his face.

She caught him to her suddenly, stormily, and kissed him with her warm lips. This fairy princess in his arms! So suddenly, unexpectedly! Gaspard's hands trembled, there was fire in his veins. He kissed her shoulders and pressed her still closer till she seemed to grow into him like a liana, a soul, a shadow. Her lovely face leaned away from him, as if the kiss were not enough and she needed to look at him—a look full of love, devouring love, as when a wild beast trembles with ecstasy, seeing its defenseless prey before it.

But Gaspard felt himself the victor. So all his renunciation, all those dead days and fears of life had brought him at last a fair princess with silver in her hair. Her pure face breathed perfume, her body burned—and above her head the crystal with its load of lights slowly revolved—

Her lips drew away from his, her warm, scented breath suddenly came through them.

"You know now?" she said in a voice as dark and tender as velvet. Gaspard touched his burning forehead with trembling fingers.

"But I . . . I'm only Pierrot from the Funambules . . ."

"You are the greatest of the Pierrots," she whispered. Her smile lost its wildness and there was nothing in it but innocence. "But do you know who I am?" she asked.

Gaspard bent and picked up the flowers which had fallen from her waist when he kissed her. He handed them to her and said tenderly:

"La dame aux camélias!"

"La dame aux camélias!" smiled the mysterious lady. "C'est bien, ça! I'll keep the name."

Young Charles—he was nearly thirteen now—did not see his father that night, and after this he had more often to content himself with old Madame Bertrand's hospitality.

His father did not love him less. He bought him presents, he was cheerful when he came home; often he sang—he who hardly spoke—but he soon went out again, and sometimes he was away from home for two or three days.

"Why is Father smiling?" Charles asked Madame Bertrand.

"Perhaps he's happy. You must be glad for him. He deserves it."

Debureau was happy, happy as he had never been before in his life. He would have liked to shout it aloud to the whole world.

Mon Dieu! everything was so glorious! He used to be afraid of waking in the morning. How gladly he welcomed the day now! Everything was enchanting, everything smiled at him: the chairs, the table, the window, the sun, the houses!

He did not regret now that he had stolen the fleeting happiness of love. If he had not feared it might escape him he would not have had to live it so passionately or with such a feeling of complete surrender.

One night, after the theater, Gaspard was sitting with his dame aux camélias on the cushions by the glowing hearth, her head pillowed on his shoulder.

"I'm beginning to have doubts about silent acting," he said, "for the first time in my life. I feel how little can be said in silence. But words, words can express so much feeling. And I'm such a bad talker . . ."

But lovely Marie Duplessis listened to him and asked to hear about his former loves, and his friendships.

"Have you been loved and admired very much?"

"Very little."

"But surely at the theater . . ."

"There was only hatred there always. When Monsieur Janin only wrote about me—and none of the others—they could have killed me for jealousy. I longed to make friends, but they didn't want to."

"How sad you must have been!"

"I yearned for love—and it has been sent me! I'm not sorry for anything now. I'm profoundly grateful for what life has given me in you. I am so rich, so rich! I would sacrifice everything for one night with you!"

She did not answer and Gaspard trembled with inward alarm. It often happened that she answered his avowals with silence when he most longed for a word to confirm his feeling of dizzy happiness. But her eyes were wandering far away and a mysterious smile fluttered about her lips like a butterfly. Gaspard was afraid of these moments; she eluded him. He must touch her to assure himself of her presence beside him and convince himself that her body had not flown away as well as her spirit. At other times she was so intimate and confiding, smiling at his jokes and notions, his stories of his childhood, his vagabond journeys about Europe— And once she told him about her own past.

"But I don't want to know it," he told her. "I'm content with mystery."

"My father was called Marin le Sorcier—that was in Normandy. My mother was a beautiful and virtuous girl but she let herself be dazzled by his handsome arrogance. When he was drunk he used to beat us both savagely and she had to run away. She got a place as a lady's maid to some rich Englishwoman and went away, I don't know where. She left me to be brought up by some peasants. My name was Alphonsine. I used to wander about the fields alone, I couldn't read or write, all I learned was the coarse oaths of the stableboys. I ran away to Paris with some strolling players, and when I got here I ran away from them. I was fourteen then. A truck gardener picked me up. I was terrible then. I believed in the devil, but he was a good man. He devoted time and patience to me, he taught me to read. Then another man took me—and who that is I can't tell you. I stayed with his daughter at a watering place, and when she died he gave me nearly everything which would have been hers."

"I don't believe even half of what you've told me," Gaspard smiled at her. "You in the country with grooms and porters? Look in the mirror and it will tell you that's a lie."

"You don't believe in my past? Perhaps my future would amuse you?"

"No." Gaspard drew his hand away. "No, please don't! Don't make me anxious and alarmed. Let me believe my happiness will last forever, and that I shall never lose you. . . ."

Paris was so beautiful! The trees in the Place des Italiens were decking themselves in clearest green, the blue sky almost skipped with happiness in the Place de la Bastille, windows glittered in the sun and everyone was gay. The dumb Pierrot now had words for everyone, for everything.

He would wander round with a group of cheerful companions, he did not much mind whom. The Boulevard de Gand was always full of dust or mud, but for all that it was one of the pleasantest places in the world. Paris went there to amuse itself; one dined very pleasantly chez Tortoni; the best cuisine was at the Café de Paris. At least once a week the merry companions used to meet there. Gaspard suddenly felt at home among them, because their conversation and their jokes suited his radiant mood. There was Dr. Véron, who knew Rachel; there was Eugène Sue in his famous green coat with big steel buttons; there

was the handsome, merry Belgian, Roger de Beauvoir, who had sacrificed the poet's laurels for the lover's roses; there was that best and most enchanting of drunkards, Etienne Berguet. And when the restaurant closed and the company broke up into smaller groups there was always someone who said, "Now do be good fellows and come home with me!" They bought cigarettes, a couple of bottles of wine, and carried on merrily at home with sparkling jokes and new songs.

Gaspard Debureau bade farewell to Murger and Nerval. They could keep their laments, he wanted to be gay. And he was, whether he would or no. Roger de Beauvoir became his chosen companion. He and Debureau were the first to begin to wear white cravats. Their bons mots were repeated by all the dandies from the Café de Paris. Dr. Véron was famous for wearing large cravats and Beauvoir addressed a letter to him as follows: "Monsieur Véron, à Paris, en cravate." When Balzac's "Père Goriot" was published Beauvoir criticized it in the *Revue de Paris*. Balzac entered into an argument with him and wrote, "Who is this person? I don't even know his name. . . ." Beauvoir sent his seconds to visit him, and one of them was Debureau. By his good offices the principals were reconciled and under the influence of Gaspard's visit Balzac wrote Beauvoir a letter of apology forty pages long. But the classical mot of Roger de Beauvoir was on the occasion when a pretty girl wished him "Bonne nuit, Roger!" "Why does she wish it me? It rests with her!" he said to his friends.

In their relations with women all the friends had this same lightness. "The most natural occupation for young men is to carry on several adventures at the same time," said Balzac. They guided themselves by this more than literally, but each of them had a favorite mistress. Gaspard differed from them in wanting faithfulness in love, while they were reconciled in advance to transitoriness.

Debureau also met Dr. Véron's mistress who was no other than Rachel: Rachel who championed de Musset as courageously as Janin had championed Debureau and with whom Gaspard had long talks about the tastes of the theater-going public. She was interesting, but not nearly so interesting as Marie Duplessis, who never came to these gatherings. When she wanted company she received some artists at home.

"Rachel does not love anyone," Marie once said to Gaspard.

"She only loves the stage and fame. She belongs to no one, even when she sells herself."

"He's a fool. It's appalling that there are such narrow-minded lovers in Paris. Why all Paris knows! He must be proud of it, or else he's trying to get rid of her. Rachel can't be faithful. Why, she told me herself she can't ever remember being a virgin."

"That's witty but it's rather revolting," was Gaspard's opinion. "How little they all have compared to me! They only have faithful or unfaithful mistresses, but I have love!"

"Are you really so happy?"

"I'm so full of strength, courage, happiness! My life belongs to you, only you! Your love is the breath of life to me!"

"Then I mustn't take it from you," whispered Marie, and her gaze wandered off into the distance where Gaspard could not and dared not follow.

## XIX

### THE MEETING WITH ARMAND DUVAL

GASPARD DEBUREAU, who had thought himself broken by life, rose to superhuman heights. He felt once more the old fountain of energy within him; it flung him into ceaseless work; set him carrying out new plans. At the Funambules he had everything in a whirl, transforming, innovating, encouraging. After days of anger and irritability had come a time of understanding and sympathy. He observed his fellow actors with sudden awareness and determined their parts according to their capacities; he had a word of encouragement for everyone. He helped Bertrand to send his mother and sister into the country and helped more than ever to keep the poet's hope alive in spite of his illness and poverty. He got up a charity performance for poor children. At his instigation Victor Hugo tried to get more humane laws regulating child labor in the factories, at least for the youngest of them, under ten years. They were not to work more than ten hours a day; their rich employers would not concede more than that.

He helped everyone who came his way. He was happy and wanted the whole world around him to be happy.

And one of these glorious, radiant days something happened: Désirée came back. When Gaspard came home, Charles ran to meet him shouting joyfully:

"Daddy! Mother's come!"

In the background stood Bertrand with a conciliating smile.

"You've come?" Gaspard repeated wonderingly. Désirée gazed at him guiltily. Ah, if he had not known Marie Duplessis, there would have been an affectionate meeting and a great reconciliation. But Gaspard now belonged to the loveliest face in the world and the finest soul that ever lodged in a woman's body, and he stared at the face of his former wife feeling completely dead towards her, completely empty. He thought of all the story of sin that was lodged within her, but he did not want to grieve anyone.

"Welcome. Have you come on a visit?"

"Yes, a visit."

"Come, Charles," said Bertrand and would have led the boy away, but Gaspard did not want scenes or solitude.

"No, stay here both of you. Désirée has come to see us and will stay as long as she likes." He held out his hand to her and kissed her forehead. She raised her head and whispered, tremblingly:

"Kill me, Gaspard, or let me stay here. But don't drive me away!"

"So you've missed us?"

"I missed the boy," confessed Désirée with bent head.

Gaspard rejoiced inwardly. The boy. That was all right; she had not come for himself. She could have the boy if she was willing to mend her ways.

"Go and give your mother a kiss," he told Charles. But he did not embrace her himself.

That evening after the show he went to a little gathering at the house of Marie Duplessis. There were only a few intimate friends there and Gaspard had no chance to speak to her alone, till he saw her go into her boudoir and hurried after her. Marie was sitting at the table looking pale and holding a handkerchief to her mouth.

"Are you ill?" he asked anxiously.

"No, it's nothing," she whispered and put a finger to her lips to warn him not to speak too loudly.

"But there's blood on your handkerchief."

"It isn't mine," smiled Marie. "My goldfinch got hurt. What did you want to say to me?"

Debureau knelt at her feet and looked up into her pale face. There was a shadow of weariness on it today.

"Ma chérie, I only long to say how gladly I would devote my whole life to you . . ." He gazed questioningly at her. "If I could only live with you!" Marie nodded her head slightly, but she did not answer. "To live with you—only you—Marie, if you wished it I'd leave my son—and everything! Even my wife who's come back today. If I could be with you forever, have you to cherish always—overwhelm you with all good things—wouldn't that be lovely?"

"Yes," she whispered, and Gaspard looked up radiantly and saw consent shining in her face.

"Oh, merci," and he covered her hand with kisses.

"Come, they're looking for us." She rose, arranged her hair with a swift movement, and hurried back to her guests.



"To live together," thought Gaspard, following her, "she would like it too, to live together!"

When he was leaving he could not even kiss her before the others as he sometimes did; he simply pressed her hand and his eyes repeated, "Together!" And she lowered her lashes—that means she agrees, thought Gaspard.

At home there was dreariness and bitterness. His wife knew that she had no right to demand faithfulness or anything else that one demands of a husband. She tried not to let him see her too much. In the mornings she took Charles to school; when she returned she saw to the cooking. But Gaspard did not mean to leave things like that; he must speak to her definitely.

"Désirée."

She turned anxious eyes to him.

No, he had not the strength, even though he knew that he was in the right. Then he would run away from her as she had from him. Unfortunately that meant running away from Charles too, and that was the greatest sorrow and the greatest sin; but we must be brave to live, and sometimes we must even be cruel, to ourselves and to others. So Gaspard plucked up his courage and when he had a chance he put his things together.

"Are you going away somewhere?" asked Désirée, coming home earlier than he expected her.

"No. I'm taking a few things to the theater."

For three or four days he had no chance to meet his mistress. They were four days which turned the color of her *camélias* from white to red. Even on these evenings she went to the theater, but she did not speak to anyone and refused all visitors. On the fifth day white flowers made her approachable once more.

Gaspard's resolution strengthened every hour. She would be happy too, he was sure of that. He must hesitate no longer, he had only one life to live and could not afford to squander it as if he had a second one in which to profit by his mistakes. When a man is over forty he has little time left for deliberation and honorable qualms. He must run after life and seize it by the mane.

Aloysius Bertrand had to go to a hospital. The poor fellow always had such bad luck. It was the very day on which Villemain appointed him librarian of Château Font. He would recover; but he looked terrible. When Debureau took him to the hospital and handed him over to those who were going to take care of him he could see that he was wasted away to a skeleton.

"Tuberculosis of the lungs," grunted the doctor.

Poor fellow, there was not much chance of his getting to Château Font. Gaspard would pray for him; he and his beautiful Marie would pray to all the powers of heaven and hell whom the unhappy poet had awakened from enchantment. And he would visit him very often.

Gaspard did not go home when he parted from Bertrand. He went downstairs with his bundle. It was not easy to go away like this—but he was going to meet his happiness. He had found it late, but it was all the more rapturous. He would miss nothing now. And he understood this: fame, for which he had longed, had had to be bought by long years of grief and affliction; and love, for which he had also longed in vain, had repaid him for all his disappointments. He understood that today—today—

If only Marie were at home, so that he could tell her everything before the evening performance—so that he need not go back and wait till night.

Her house. The windows were shut. It was October and the late afternoon was chilly. But he thought he heard the sound of a piano in the salon. Then she was at home.

The maid wanted to go and announce him, but he would not let her. Wait, it's a surprise—sh-sh, not a word—and he slowly approached the tall doorway, his parcel in his hand. He raised the latch and suddenly flung the door wide.

He stood on the threshold as though struck by lightning and his parcel rolled on the floor.

Marie Duplessis was sitting at the piano and a young man with black hair was bending over her. His lips were on her shoulder and his arm round her waist.

They drew apart. Marie stopped playing and rose. The young man looked curiously at the newcomer.

"I did not know you were coming," said Marie with her habitual smile and shining eyes.

He looked from her to her companion.

"You don't know Monsieur Debureau of the Funambules?"

"This is Monsieur Debureau? Present me to him, please," said the young man with enthusiasm. "I have often seen you. I admire your acting greatly."

"Monsieur Armand Duval," Marie presented him.

Gaspard forgot to bow. A sardonic expression had settled about his tightly closed lips. He seemed not to look at the two young people before him, he was gazing at the ceiling in search

of his own being. But he found nothing there, not even pain. All was emptiness, emptiness.

"You wanted to tell me something?" asked Marie tenderly in her velvet tones. As she spoke she leaned against Armand Duval's arm and put her head on his shoulder. Armand was not ashamed before the visitor; he was very much in love and kissed Marie's hair. But he could not see her eyes. Only Gaspard could see them. Black and beautiful, they held no mystery today but instead of it an entreaty: Friend Gaspard, please understand—understand and go—

"Oh, it's nothing important," Gaspard managed with dry lips. "I didn't know you had such a charming visitor. I only wanted to tell you—that—that my son Charles is at the top of his class."

The black eyes were full of fervent thanks. He could almost hear a whisper: Ami Pierrot, merci! Then she smiled and said in her velvet voice:

"I'm so glad! Please take him this present from me!" And she handed him a lovely big Pierrot doll.

"And from me—" said Monsieur Duval, "a warm greeting and this small gift—" He handed Gaspard the beautiful pin from his cravat.

"Why, you don't even know him," objected Gaspard.

"It doesn't matter. If Marie loves him he must deserve it. And besides," he leaned over confidentially to Gaspard, but the girl could hear what he said, "I'm so happy, so astonishingly happy—I should like everyone to know how happy I am!"

Gaspard crushed down a bitter-sweet feeling in his breast at these words, which had lately been his own, and accepted the gift in the name of a happiness which he knew and had just lost. With an inclination of his head he said:

"I thank you, I thank you both."

Duval did not understand clearly why the great Debureau was so touched by such a trifle. But in a moment Pierrot was once more wearing his famous smile which overcame everything. He picked up his parcel again.

"Au revoir," said Marie, holding out her hand.

"I'm afraid," said Gaspard, "that we shan't see each other again for a long time."

"Why?"

"I've a lot of rehearsing to do—and a lot of performances. A Pierrot's job is hard work, you know."

The dark eyes were full of tears, but perhaps Gaspard could not see them and only heard the soft voice saying:

"Then adieu—adieu—jusqu'au revoir—"

"Adieu, jusqu'au revoir—"

Gaspard walked along the quay, in one hand he carried the heavy parcel in which he had packed all his past life, in the other he carried the Pierrot doll. He dragged himself along through the October evening. A west wind ruffled the yellow waters of the Seine, and turned the weather vanes on the roofs. From the houses came the smell of suppers cooking. Women passed him and looked at him curiously.

"Adieu, jusqu'au revoir—"

For Gaspard that meant never. No, he would never recover from this wound. He made no reproaches, there was no one to be angry with. It was his own mistake, his own folly. He had yearned for the impossible and the impossible could not happen. It was not unnatural. His lonely disappointment did not hurt so much as the knowledge that now he would never— He would not even hope any more. This time he had lost, once and for all.

"Adieu."

Rows of gaslamps lit up the evening. Without knowing what he did, Gaspard turned in the direction of the theater. Perhaps even a couple of years ago he would not have acted at a time like this. He would have crawled away somewhere where no one would find him, to be alone with his agony all night. But the theater was as much part of him as the breath he drew.

He did not hear what was said to him, he did not know why he smiled. Somehow he had dressed and made himself up. He acted without thinking what he was doing. A year ago it would have been a duel between suffering and art; but he was so used to his work and so accustomed to serve his audience that he did not feel the pain—only emptiness, a cruel black emptiness within him.

The performance ended.

He made his way home, going back to the place which he had hoped to leave forever. Fortunately he had never said why he was going; if he had, he would not have been able to go back, he would have been ashamed. But it was scarcely better as it was. To whom was he going home? To a wife who was a stranger to him and whom he could never love—and to his son, before whom

he must feel ashamed since his attempt to run away from him. He had been ready to do him that injury.

He knew that Désirée was awake; he could hear her gasp, but he did not want to speak to her. He simply put down the Pierrot doll and the tiepin beside the sleeping Charles and unpacked his things from the unlucky parcel.

A sleepless night. Silver memories crowding one upon another, each wearing a flower of sorrow. Dark innocent eyes which said: Forgive me, I have another lover and I love him—Forgive me, forgive me, friend Pierrot. . . .

Next morning came a letter from Bertrand.

"I miss you, dear friend—I feel weak and began this letter ten times before I was able to finish it. . . ."

Gaspard went to see him, the witness of the most glorious days of his love.

"It's the crisis," the doctor told him.

"I can hear you, but I can't see you," said Bertrand.

Gaspard did not speak of his own sorrow but of the book *Gaspard at Night* which was soon to be published, and how Bertrand would soon be well again. Gaspard did not wonder that his friend's breathing was growing weaker; he did not wonder at anything. Life had taught him to expect the worst.

He did not even wonder when beside the dead body of the last of his friends he met David the painter, who had come to make a last sketch of him for a miniature for the poor boy's mother. Death had destroyed the hopes of a lifetime. The enchanting book *Gaspard at Night* was just published, but the author was dead and could never see it.

He did not even wonder when, along with David, he followed the poet on his last journey to the cemetery at Vaugirard. As they were carrying the coffin out of the chapel a violent storm broke. Lightning darted across the sky while the priest was saying the prayers over the grave.

Perhaps it has to be so. Those who give the people most—poets, painters, musicians, actors—must suffer the most.

Gaspard Debureau would never wonder at anything again. But Pierrot's face had lost its smile.

## XX

### A MURDERER IN PRISON

PERFECTION in acting cannot be lost. Perhaps only Pierrot knew of the cold emptiness within him. But the whole of his life was habit. He breathed more naturally on the stage than in the street. Only when he dragged himself into the wings did he feel exhausted. On the stage he flashed like a meteor. He was admired as much as ever, his performances were always full of fresh interest; only he could feel how the inner fires which had warmed him with life-giving heat were slowly dying out in ashes.

But in his soul the embers of gratitude still glowed, both for the honor Marie had conferred on him and the happiness of those few nights, surpassing everything that he had ever experienced with any woman on earth; and for the enchantment which crowned his fame and his love for the theater. His strength was broken. He was forty-three, forty-five— His youth, spent in frosts and rains and want and hunger, was revenging itself now. His spirit had lost its resilience. Perhaps—if he had lived in happiness, in mutual affection; if he had had something to yearn for and strive for, he would have offered more resistance. But now that he was sure that what it was possible to win was already his and was already squandered and wasted, now he no longer cared. His spirit laid down its arms and his body showed the wounds inflicted in past battles. His health was undermined.

Love had departed and taken away her songs. The enchantment of the stage no longer gave him strength. Yet after "The Rag Seller" he chose to act a pantomime in which he created the merriest Pierrot whom he had ever presented: "Pierrot in Straits." There was still a gleam left. So long as his strength lasted. And in "Pierrot in Straits" he had some lively scenes in which he spoke to the audience most eloquently. Pierrot's troubles grew into everyone's distress; his hope became the hope of the community. By a daily improvisation he was able to comment upon each fresh attempt to shake off the yoke, on each fresh blow of the brutal hand of the Government, each attempt by which Prince Napoleon advertised himself. He was able to do honor to

the painter Charlet who died, brush in hand, painting his great picture of the Emperor on horseback. He was able to comment on each scrap of news of revolt in Poland or elsewhere where the fermentation rose up in an outburst.

Désirée did not come to find him when she came in from her errands, and he could not go to look for her. They came together a little, but Charles, who might have formed the focus of their new relationship, was too much on his father's side to have much affection for his mother. Besides that he was leaving school—he was sixteen, seventeen—and his father had found him a place with a watchmaker.

"Couldn't I act too, Dad?" young Debureau asked timidly.

"It's not a matter of taste but of talent," his father told him.

"I should like very much to act . . . I've often had a go at it by myself."

"That's no real training. It's not a matter of luck. You have to feel it in yourself as an urge, a need without which you can't live. If it's not like that, go and learn watchmaking. It's quite a decent job and you'll have learned a trade to live by. Don't think of the stage, boy—it's a cruel profession—you need to have a passion for it, not a mere inclination."

So Charles worked at his watchmaking and only came home in the evenings, so that the family life was completely broken up, since Gaspard was never at home in the evenings. Désirée drifted to and fro between the two of them like a wrecked ship. No one was unkind to her but no one ever said they were glad to see her. Whenever he could, Charles went to the performance at the Funambules in the evening.

"Why do you go there?" his father would ask in the morning as Charles was going out to work.

"I'm learning from you."

"The actor's art can't be learned from anybody. I thought that once in my life, when I copied Félix's Harlequin, but it was no good, they simply laughed at me. You must have art within you. It's only what's really your own that has any value."

"Oh, well, if you won't believe me!" protested Charles.

The elder Debureau simply waved his hand. Partly he disbelieved his son and partly he was afraid for him. He would do anything rather than throw him into the stormy and treacherous whirlpool of the stage and let him suffer as he had himself.

Sometimes—quite exceptionally—he would invite his wife and son to go for a walk with him on a Sunday afternoon before

the performance. They could not go too far away from the theater, so they used to walk up and down the Boulevard du Temple and watch the crowd. They walked between the shop assistants and salesgirls who were hurrying to the Rue Basse to dance. The smell of smoked sausage and fried potatoes came from the little Café au Père de Famille where all the supers used to meet before the afternoon performance. The early members of the audience were forming queues outside the booking offices of the little theaters of which there were so many scattered along the whole length of the Boulevard. The longest queue was always outside the Funambules where a large notice flamed with the name of the man walking unrecognized in the crowd. He was glad that they did not know him. He gave his Pierrot to the people, but he did not want to show them the unlucky Gaspard Debureau. For him they were two different people.

The only show which could compete with the Funambules was the Circus Franconi. It had been burned down not long ago, but now it was once more attracting people with its decorated exterior and the large posters announcing that it could seat three thousand spectators; ten times as many as the Funambules. It was not a mere circus; very famous actors appeared there; Lemaitre played "Othello," Cheri and Bauchêne gave plays by Victor Hugo. Just now Edmond was giving the same kind of Napoleonic play that Gobert was giving at the Tour St. Martin and Cazot at the Variétés. All the Parisian theaters were giving plays with a Napoleonic tinge. Debureau gave his improvisations instead.

Debureau liked to have a look at the Circus to see the sort of rival it was. Things were livelier than usual there today, and it soon was clear why. In front of the theater stood a group of youths who were clamoring for the play's poster to be taken down. It bore the words "First in the Empire" and a silhouette reminiscent of the Emperor's profile.

"Away with that scrawl!" they shouted.

"Oho," shouted the people who had come hurrying to see the play so as to be able to applaud at least the Emperor's memory.

"Away with that scarecrow!" cried the royalists.

"Silence!" shouted Debureau angrily.

Some of the youths who were making the fuss turned on him.

"Clear out!" they cut him short. Prancing about before the portrait they demanded again: "Take away the old sinner!"



Debureau was beside himself. He seized one of the young men by the shoulder and swung him round to face him.

"D'you know what you're shouting? Clear out this minute! You've no sense!"

The youth stared at him and seemed to recognize him.

"You clown!" he cried and pulled himself away.

Debureau, wounded in the depths of his sensitive soul by the insult, was filled with fury and slapped the young royalist in the face.

"Ho—ho—ho, Debureau!" the whole group began to chant, and flung themselves upon Gaspard, but those who were for the Emperor defended him, and they were more numerous. Only one of the rioters reached Gaspard and tried to give him a blow with his fist, but Gaspard swung his stick and his aggressor fell back, struck on the head.

The police came up and intervened. The last of the rioters had to be carried away; everything was investigated. Gaspard was let off temporarily so that he could go and act. Presently everything was quiet outside the Circus.

But Gaspard acted badly that afternoon. He felt that both he and the audience had been insulted. He gave them a clown to help and cheer them, he gave it to them for love, and they were using it to ridicule him, using it as the most humiliating insult to him as an individual.

"What's the matter with you, Gaspard?" asked old Bertrand, who was still his manager.

"I'm getting old," answered Debureau.

"You go home and have a good sleep."

"I'll try to."

But he was unable to follow the good advice. When the curtain fell for the last time, Gaspard Debureau was arrested. The royalist rioter whom he had struck on the head was dead. And the famous Pierrot spent the night in the prison of St. Pelagie.

No one could believe the news in the papers next day. Had Pierrot been copying his namesake and perpetrating some wild prank? Or was the whole thing a hoax? But the details showed it to be a nasty business. The boulevards were divided for and against him. Some blamed him, insisting that he was bad-tempered, touchy, and evil-minded—if he had killed a man he had certainly done it from outraged vanity and motives of personal vengeance. Others stood their ground bravely and defended him

from the majority, which is always inclined to believe anything evil and throws mud at a man the more joyfully the more pure-minded and blameless he is. George Sand, Gautier, de Musset and Hugo fought with all their might in his defense and to clear his reputation as an artist. Malicious tongues used the fact that he was not a Frenchman to blacken his name. Kaspar Dvorjak—his real name became known at the first hearing of the case—had lied to the whole public of Paris, pretending to them that he was French. "He never did anything of the sort," Janin defended him. "On the contrary, he was offended that I did not explain clearly enough that he was a Czech!" But although to sensible people Debureau was simply an unfortunate man who had killed a ruffian in self-defense, to the thoughtless and superficial crowd he was a liar and murderer. Many people in the theatrical world who envied him took trouble to keep that opinion alive.

And Gaspard? What was the melancholy Pierrot doing in the painful setting which he had chosen to select for this scene just before the end of the play? He was full of remorse and terribly grieved about the boy who was dead.

"I had not the least intention of wounding him," he repeated to the judge almost in tears. "Why, I've never hurt anyone. If I'd known how it would turn out I'd far rather have taken the blow that he was aiming at me. I waved my stick at random, and hit him. I am punished enough already."

"Justice will decide that."

"I know, Monsieur le Juge, I only want to say that I shall never forgive myself. The boy will have had parents—a mistress. . . . How they will be cursing me! All my life!"

"He had no relatives, but he seems to have been a talented young man. He had been punished for theft more than once."

"That's nothing to me, but God knows I'm glad he was alone in the world and that I haven't the misery of his family on my conscience. But in any case, Monsieur le Juge, there's blood on my hands and that's a terrible feeling—for me, who loves humanity so much."

"You mustn't be so excitable."

The ageing Debureau hung his head again.

"C'est vrai. If we could have had a talk together we might perhaps have made friends. It was very thoughtless of me."

The judge ordered Gaspard back to his cell, but Gaspard had one more request to make.

"Monsieur le Juge, one small matter. . . . You don't happen to know whether they're still playing at the Funambules?"

"I don't know. But your son's waiting outside. You can have a talk with him."

"Merci."

Charles stood there with drooping shoulders and uncertain eyes. He did not know how to look his father in the face.

"Tell me, Charles, are they playing at the Funambules?"

"Yes, Father."

"Without me?" cried Debureau, disappointed.

"Monsieur Bertrand said it was necessary—in the interest of both artist and management."

"And who—?" Debureau did not even dare to pronounce the bitter words.

"Legrand."

"That cipher. That empty bag. How often have I told Bertrand that he knows nothing at all. And he's playing my Pierrot! He'll spoil everything—the whole play!"

"Come along," said the warder.

"And no other news?" asked Debureau as he was going.

"Oh, yes, Dad," his son called after him, "the audience shouted that they wanted you and only you. . . ."

"Bravo! Tell them I'm coming back . . ." called Debureau as he disappeared through the heavy iron doors.

Charles broke down and cried then. He had kept his tears back before his father. It had been his first heroic bit of acting. The tale about the audience was a lie; no one had murmured. But it had made Gaspard happy, and so Charles was happy, too. It bound him, of course, to keep on bringing his father good news. Why shouldn't he give him a little comfort in his dark hole? He would tell him that the audience were expecting him back, that he was irreplaceable in the company, that all Paris was fêting him.

He did not, however, tell him that he had overwhelmed Bertrand with offers to act in his father's place. Nor did he tell him that Désirée had run away again. He kept quiet about that and did not reproach himself for the deception. He would only tell his father the good news.

He was sure that his father would have acted the same way.

## XXI

### FORGOTTEN FLOWERS

GASPARD had been vindicated and released. A month of interrogations and imprisonment had not broken him as had the knowledge of how people's view of him had changed. He would have liked to go from one to another and plead with them and convince them. But he saw the dislike and mistrust in their faces; he had been their darling and had disappointed them.

Gaspard believed that he must act. The theater could not go on without him; above all the public could not do without him.

"No, Gaspard," Bertrand tried to convince him, "you can't act, you must have a rest, you're ill. Let's wait till you're quite recovered."

"I may be ill, but I must act. You're not going to let anyone else act Pierrot?"

"Be sensible, Gaspard," Bertrand tried to persuade him. And when that was no use, he had to bring out his real reason. "The people wouldn't like to see you now."

"Why not?" asked Gaspard, horrified.

"They know all about you now—how your wife ran away."

"Is that so dreadful? Every second man in Paris has an unfaithful wife—and no one cares twopence."

"And then—about your not being a Frenchman—they say if you aren't, you can't personify French *esprit* perfectly on the stage. And that you only act dumb-show because you don't speak French. . . ."

"Miserable wretches!" stormed Gaspard. "Liars! Has no one stood up for me—taken my part?"

"They have. But you know what people are. I'm telling you the truth, Gaspard. The public must forget about that affair of the young man getting killed before you can go back on the stage. You'll see how they'll welcome you back later. But we must think it over well—and not rush the thing. . . ."

"All right, Bertrand, all right," whispered Gaspard.

He aged terribly in the days that followed. He had come out of prison full of life, looking forward to the battle; but now his head was bent, he seemed to have grown smaller. His face was pale and his forehead and cheeks were seamed with wrinkles. And saddest of all were the deeply sunken eyes in their dark caverns.

He waited. He shut himself up at home and pored over his memories—through whole long lonely days and nights. Charles crept about the place on tiptoe as if in a sickroom. Gaspard rarely went out. He visited the old and well-known places as if they had been tombs. Once he went down to the bridge to try and find the witnesses of his attempted suicide; but the hovels were no longer there. Who knew where his former rescuers were now, or even if they were still alive? He wandered about like a tramp through the maze of narrow, crooked, dirty little streets between the Palais de Justice and Notre Dame. He listened to the creaking of the lanterns overhead; and he listened to the silence. He wandered away from his beloved theater and then, drawn both by hatred and love, came back to it again.

He did not meet any of his old friends. Some of them were rising too rapidly and had no time to remember him now. Others cast a pitying glance at him and turned their backs. And still others avoided him. He only found three who held out their hands to him unreservedly.

Victor Hugo said to him: "You inspired me to write 'Marion Delorme' by your conversation that time at Mogador's—Come and see the play." But Gaspard did not go to the theater any more. He did not want to weep.

Gérard de Nerval wrote of him till the end as the most peerless actor of pantomime. But when they met, he found Gaspard disappointing. Gérard had lost his sense of reality. He demanded that Gaspard should journey with him to the moon, insisted on things which were not true. His gifted brain was beginning to grow dim.

And Alfred de Musset sat for hours at a time, either alone or with a companion, silent over his absinthe, ruining his already ruined health. "I came too late into a world grown old . . ." He did not try to change himself now. He was all alone, even the romantics called him a traitor. "My glass is a small one, but I only drink from my own." And he knew nothing but the despairing labyrinth of his own soul.

Thus Debureau was left without friends.

The only person who came to see him was the ouvreuse from the theater who came to clean out his rooms once a week. She was the one person who came near him and brought him the news. She was old and faded now; she did not open the boxes at the theater any longer; she had had to make way for someone younger. But there was still a look of admiration in her eyes as

she looked at the old Pierrot, even if it was hidden under the disappointment and resignation of an old woman.

"I remember," he said to her once, "you always used to be so cheerful—you used to sing snatches of songs . . ."

"Did you notice that?" she asked him with gentle reproach, so gentle that the moody Debureau did not even notice it.

"Yes. You were ouvreuse in the boxes, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"We had some fine folk in the boxes, didn't we?" said Gaspard meditatively. "Do people like that still go to the Funambules?"

"I don't know. I only go there to do the cleaning. But I don't think the acting there is so good now."

"You're trying to console me," smiled Gaspard. "And why didn't you ever get married? You were such a—that is to say, you're pretty still, of course."

"Nobody asked me," she smiled tearfully.

"I once gave you a bunch of flowers, didn't I?"

"What a good memory you have."

"Yes, fairly," answered Gaspard, but he did not understand. "What is your Christian name, Mademoiselle?"

"Aimée."

He asked it her now after almost twenty years. It interested him now, after all that time.

"Aimée? It's a pretty name."

"A name like that doesn't suit me now, at my age."

But Gaspard was thinking of another name, the likeness between the two names had made him think of his wife.

"Well, well, time puts his mark on us all. I had a wife called Désirée—and I don't even know where she is . . ."

"If Monsieur would permit . . ."

"Do you know anything about her? How's she getting on?"

"Very well. She's living with a jeweler."

"God bless her," sighed Gaspard. "I'm glad she's getting on all right."

"You're always so good to everyone, Monsieur Debureau."

"Do you think so? And they're all so bad to me. You don't—you don't happen to know where Mademoiselle Duplessis lives now?"

"They say she's ill—very ill."

"Is she? Poor girl. I was thinking—" and he stared into the distance before him, "if I might possibly meet her some day."

"I wish you could."

Gaspard looked at her with a burst of sympathy.

"You're such a good soul, Aimée."

Aimée swallowed down something in her throat—it might have been a sob or only a word—and merely whispered:

"You know, Monsieur Debureau, I've had a bad time, too."

"Who was the brute who deceived you?"

"Oh, that's all past." Aimée drove the painful thoughts from her. "What's the good of thinking about it? I've got your windows to clean today." And she went on with her work.

Gaspard watched her attentively. How the poor girl had aged. Somehow love had passed her by—perhaps love had invited her, but her heart had been fixed on someone else. Had she had a bad time? And in Gaspard's mind the curtain was slowly raised upon her small, unimportant secret, the secret which had been the cause of a barren human life and a woman's unfulfilled love.

He slipped out without saying anything. A few moments later he returned, carrying something behind his back, and sat down as if nothing had happened. Aimée finished her work, washed her hands, laid the table for him, and said good night.

Debureau rose from the table and went up to her. With an appealing look—like a guilty schoolboy—he handed her a little bunch of lilies of the valley.

It was a grave, sad moment. Aimée raised her eyes to him.

"Please take them," said Debureau with difficulty. "Those flowers that time—they were from you, weren't they?"

"No!" choked Aimée, and her faded eyes were dim with tears.

"Forgive the world that gave you a bad time," Debureau pleaded brokenly. "We have all so much to forgive. Forgive me for these twenty years . . . Aimée!"

She took the flowers from him. They were an odd pair: the ageing actor and the gray-haired woman, looking as grave as lovers at their first assignation.

"It wasn't my fault, Aimée. I looked at the world differently. And now, alas, it's too late."

Aimée nodded. She knew it was too late. All she wanted to say was that she wanted nothing—the flowers were more than she had dared to hope for—her life had had a beauty of its own in her faithfulness to a single love.

But she was afraid of spoiling the loveliness of the moment, so she did not even look at Gaspard, but slipped quickly and silently out.

It was too late.

## XXII

### PIERROT'S LAST APPEARANCE

BERTRAND was of the opinion that Gaspard might appear again. He saw that no one could replace him, and too he was sorry for the old actor. But Gaspard did not want to come back.

"I'm really ill now."

"I'll fetch the doctor to you."

"He can't help me."

"Then who can?"

"No one."

"What do you want to do?"

"I'm very busy, Bertrand."

"What with?"

"My memories."

He could not be persuaded to change his mind. There was no fire left within him; all was extinguished. He did not believe he could act well. He did not believe he would know why he was acting or to whom. He was sure he would burst into tears and never be able to raise a laugh.

But it was not true that only memories occupied him. He had roused himself again and was taking an interest in life around him. Poor children and their parents knew him as a kind old gentleman. Once a week he went round to those who he knew needed his help and gave them something from his small store. It was not much, certainly, but he had nothing to save for now. Charles was earning, and he had no one else to hoard for. And if he could not go on the stage any more, why should he not distribute happiness in this way? Sometimes he went as far as Montfaucon, where Margot lived. She had married a knacker and Gaspard had met her again by chance a few years before when she was selling fishhooks and worms under the bridge near Notre Dame. They had been overjoyed to see each other.

"We're meeting for the fourth time in our lives, and I feel we know each other quite well!" said Margot.

"Some people get on together at once," agreed Gaspard. "It has nothing to do with how often they see each other."



"You know, we ought to have got married—we might have been very happy. What was that song?"

And this time Gaspard reminded her:

"Je t'attend toujours . . ."

Gaspard would sometimes go to visit her, shake hands with her gray-haired husband and swing her little boy on his foot.

"And do you remember the little boy you came to act for that time? He got well after all! He's a student now. He still remembers you."

"I wish there were more who remembered," said Gaspard wistfully.

In his immediate neighborhood he had chances to do kindnesses as well. Edouard Bernhard was a friend of his son's, but slightly older than he. He was living with a young girl called Judith. She was a laundress and they had not a penny between them. And then they had a baby.

"I say, Dad! Edouard's got a baby girl," Charles announced.

"Not little Judith's baby?"

Edouard edged through the door looking rather guilty.

"I'm awfully happy about it, Monsieur Debureau."

"I expect you are, you young reprobate, but who's going to keep the baby? Shall you give her your paragraphs to eat?"

"We shall both work. Judith's happy about it, too."

"You might at least have got married first."

"We're going to, Monsieur Debureau. I only wanted to ask you if you could . . ."

"Lend them something to be going on with," Charles helped him out.

"Of course I will," cried Debureau, almost angrily. "What are you going to call the baby?"

"Sarah."

"I'll lend you some money, but go and get married at once. Her name's to be Sarah Bernhard, mind!"

"I promise, Monsieur Debureau."

"And mind you bring her up properly—I shall keep an eye on her."

"She shall be an actress, Monsieur Debureau—after you."

"That's enough. Now off with you back to the poor little mother, you young scoundrel!"

Edouard hurried away with the money.

"I'm glad you've been so nice to them, Dad." Charles came and sat down beside his father at the table.

"Eh, what? Fetch the dominoes, boy, let's have a game."

"Dad, don't you think I could have a shot at acting one of these days?" Charles suggested timidly as he placed his domino.

Debureau was firm on this question.

"Have you got on lately? Have you been studying it? No? Then you can't go on the stage."

"I have been studying."

"Where and when?"

"I go to a different theater every evening, and to the Funambules oftenest."

"I've told you, that's no use at all. Watching other people won't help you. You must create."

"I think about it all the time. I watch people, as you used to. If you like, I'll act you something now."

Debureau pushed the dominoes aside and clasped his hands.

"Very well. Act me something."

"You look awfully scornful, but I'll try. Who shall I be?"

"You can be me."

"No, not you, Dad. I'll be Edouard Bernhard. Shall I?"

He went out of the room and came in again with a guilty expression on his face. His eyes seemed to be saying Monsieur Debureau, I'm awfully sorry, but you see, I've got a baby—showing it in his arms—and I love her. But we're very poor—we haven't a sou to bless ourselves with. Won't you help us out? His eyes were pleading.

"Is that very bad?" Charles asked when he had finished.

"No. Not very bad," admitted Debureau. "But it's not convincing enough."

"Do tell me what's wrong with it, Dad."

"No, Charles." His father brought his fist down on the table. "I don't want you to act. I don't want you to go through what I've been through."

"But you were famous, Dad!"

"And what did it bring me? No. I'm the best judge, because I've been through it all. I'm fond of you, Charles, my boy, and that's why I don't want to expose you . . ."

"I'm afraid you'll have to, Dad," said the younger Debureau guiltily.

"What d'you mean?"

"The manager—Bertrand—has consented to my acting."

"It's a lie!"

"It's true!"

"When?"

"Starting tomorrow afternoon—Sunday. He's trying me out afternoon and evening."

Gaspard rose angrily and began to pace the room.

"It's impossible—impossible. Do you mean to go on the stage against my will?"

"You said yourself, Dad, that if I had a passion for it . . ."

"And what name do you mean to act under?"

"Debureau!"

"What?" Gaspard cried out as if he had been stung. "But that's my name! You can't act under my name!"

"It's my name too."

"Yes. But Debureau, Pierrot-Debureau, that's me and no one else. People would think I was acting. The name's never been any one's but mine. I made it famous."

"I thought you'd be pleased to see it on the posters again and have the crier announcing . . ."

"He shan't announce it. Act if you like, but choose another name for the stage. There are scores of better names than Debureau. Call yourself Neuilly or Polisse or Carmagnol—anything you like, but Debureau doesn't belong on the stage now. Debureau is only one person and that's myself!"

"What a pity," said Charles sadly. "I was looking forward to it so much."

"That's enough about it."

"You see, I thought you'd be pleased if some of your friends heard and came to the theater—and saw that you've someone to carry on the tradition."

"What friends?"

"Writers—actors— Don't be angry, Dad . . ."

"Well?"

"Perhaps even some of the famous beauties whom you used to know . . ."

"There were very few."

"Perhaps even—the famous Mademoiselle Duplessis."

"She's ill."

"No, she's well again. People say she's left Monsieur Duval . . ."

Gaspard got up abruptly.

"Who says so?"

"Everyone. Some say she left him and others say they had

to part because his father insisted. But she's said to be appearing at theaters by herself again."

"Is that true?" Gaspard held his breath.

"I heard it from people who saw her."

"And she goes to the theater . . ."

"Every evening."

"Do you think she'll come to the Funambules?"

"Why not? She used to come there often when you were acting."

"Yes," said Debureau brokenly. "And you say you're acting tomorrow—and that it's clearly written up there D-E-B-U-R-E-A-U?"

"Yes. They start announcing it today."

"What play are they giving tomorrow?"

"'The Rag Seller.' Your most famous part."

"The part in which she first saw me," whispered Debureau. Charles began to feel a little hopeful.

"So you see, Dad, I thought how nice it would be if she came there and found Debureau there again, but your son . . ."

"No!" cried Debureau with sudden resolution. "Not you."

"Why?"

"Because if she comes, I want her to find me!"

"You, Dad? But . . ."

"Yes, me! Because tomorrow I'm going to play Pierrot!"

The theater was packed. An old star was reappearing in the theatrical firmament. Curiosity was mingled with wonder. The well-known name which was half-forgotten was upon all lips.

The curtain rose. The audience held their breath.

Yes, it was he, their old, well-known Pierrot: his walk, his carriage, his mask. Nothing was changed. It was only when he had to make quick movements that they saw that he was carrying not only the burden of his wandering thoughts, but the weight of years. He looked thin and fragile, there was exhaustion in his movements. And through the audience went a murmur of disappointment. He was not himself any longer.

His trained actor's sense caught it at once, and his courage wavered. His spirit was willing, but his body would not obey. He realized that he no longer dominated the audience, they were not watching him in fascination, but critically. And at that his spirit failed, too. His uneasiness became more and more apparent. Only one thing could have saved him, but he looked in vain in

the boxes for the face of the woman who had hailed him as the greatest of the Pierrots. It was only in dreams that he saw it: the pale dazzling face. He breathed heavily, unable to overcome his fatigue. No, this was not Pierrot. He felt ashamed. He dared not even venture on a jump for fear of a fall. He was afraid—yes, convinced—of being ridiculous. And there broke out in him a visible struggle between the desire to go on acting and the impulse to rush from the stage. At last he lost the last remnants of his strength; he felt that retreat would be better, and more courageous, and less ridiculous.

He stopped halfway through a scene and his arms fell to his sides. No, he would act no further. But he knew that he owed the audience an explanation, and went forward to the footlights. In front of him he saw his dear public for whom he had so often acted, giving them joy and pleasure. How to explain it to them? He tried to speak—move his lips—but his throat was dry. He made one more attempt, but he could not get out a single word!

He ceased to try with words, and began to speak his own, wordless language.

I wanted to act again, said his hands and his face. I have always loved you, I love you still. But I overestimated my strength. I am getting old and my heart is tired. My acting days are over. Forgive me. This is the last time that I shall act Pierrot— The last time—

Once more he stood still with folded hands and a face as sad as if he were beside a grave.

The people knew what he meant. This last scene was very easy to understand. No one clapped, no one shouted. They merely rose slowly to their feet and stood there sadly saying good-by to their beloved Pierrot. Then they all went out. Debureau had played for the last time.

Pierrot took a step or two backwards, and the curtain suddenly fell. It was like the crash of the guillotine.

This was not the work of human hands. Later it was found out that the rope which had held the curtain up through so many of Debureau's performances had worn through.

That was why the curtain fell.

Bertrand was in a rage with Gaspard for spoiling the performance.

"And tonight we must give the show! The house is sold out."

"Be patient with him," said old Laplace. "I thought he was heroic."

"And now he's sitting with his head on the table crying. I am patient. But something has got to be done."

"Don't be alarmed," said Gaspard Debureau, looking up. "You'll give the show all right."

"Forgive me, Gaspard, but I'm not your friend only, I'm a manager as well. Whom can I count on now? Legrand doesn't know the part, and the announcements say that you're acting."

"You can leave them like that."

"But you've made your farewell . . ."

"Don't be afraid, I'm not returning. But Debureau will play tonight?"

"Who?"

"My son."

Charles joined the group.

"But, Dad, you said you wouldn't let me."

"He must play."

"It was meant to be only a trial trip."

"I'll answer for him. Look at him—he's strong and slender and supple."

"I know the part upside down," said Charles.

"I'll take him along with me now and give him a tip or two."

"And you think that'll do?"

"You can rely on me, Bertrand, you know I've never let you down."

"No, that's true."

"If he makes a success of it will you give him my contract?"

"I don't see why not."

Gaspard took his son away to his dressing room.

"Oh, Dad, I never thought you'd be so kind!"

"Have I ever been unkind to you?"

"Of course not. But I never believed you'd help me on to the stage yourself."

"It's my duty. I've taken a Debureau away from the people—and must give them another." They went into the old dressing room. "Sit down. I'll make you up." He took out his old make-up box and drew the first lines on his forehead, then on his cheeks, round the lips and on the chin. "You must be a perfect Pierrot. Now tell me something. Are you afraid?"

Charles hesitated over his answer.

"Don't be afraid, boy. Tell me the truth. Are you afraid about going on tonight?"

"If I must be absolutely truthful, Dad, then—well, yes—I'm in a hell of a sweat."

"That's all right," smiled Gaspard. "That's what I wanted to know. Without that uncertainty about your artistic performance, there is no true art. If you have no fear and uncertainty, you're an arrogant, presumptuous mountebank, not an artist. Thank God you're not like that. Be as anxious as you like, you'll lose it all the moment you get on the stage." He set the white Pierrot cap on his head and powdered his face for him.

"You said you'd some tips to give me, didn't you?" his son reminded him.

"No, I'm not going to show you how to do it. But I'll tell you one thing. Think! All the time you're acting, think! If you want to say you're hungry, *think* you're hungry! If you want to show that you're in love, *think* love in your heart! If you've to say it's too late, then think it. Simply think all the time without stopping. Never consider how you're to express it. If the thought is in your mind and the feeling in your heart, you will express it convincingly without knowing how—"

The mask was ready. Charles slipped into the white tunic and trousers—and Pierrot stood there. His father considered his work with an expert eye. He was satisfied.

"Are you going?" asked Charles anxiously.

"You don't want me to stay here?"

"I thought you'd watch."

"No, my dear boy. I believe you will be a success. But to look on at it would hurt me too much. It was my whole life, I don't know if you can understand that. It's hard to see the end of one's life."

"I know, Dad. Well, I'll do what I can. And I'll remember what you told me."

"One more bit of advice. When you get on the stage, think what a joy it is to act, to be somewhere removed from ordinary life, and to give the people beauty. It's an intoxicating happiness—to act!"

"Yes," whispered Charles Debureau.

His father went out by his other exit, as he used to do. On the way he met Aimée.

"Monsieur Debureau!"

"Didn't I tell you it was too late?" he said and smiled, but his voice sounded suspiciously soft.

Aimée did not know what to answer.

"Keep an eye on my son," said Debureau quickly, and then went out by the little door onto the boulevard.

"Walk up, walk up, ladies and gentlemen, for tonight we are presenting the famous pantomime, 'The R-r-r-rag Seller.' The part of Pierrot is taken by Monsieur Debureau. I can see you don't believe me, but perhaps you will when I tell you that it's not Monsieur Gaspard Debureau whom you used to know but Charles Debureau, his son. He has inherited his father's talent, but he is much better, as he is younger. Walk up, walk up, walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and see our performance!"

Gaspard was not listening. He had gone away.

Behind and before and around him was the hubbub of the theaters along the boulevard, great stars shining and new ones being born.

The evening performance began at the Funambules. Charles Debureau played Pierrot. But Gaspard could not have seen it tonight. He would have seen too little.

"Walk up, walk up, walk up, ladies and gentlemen . . ."



## XXIII

### THE LONGEST ROAD

IT was carnival day in the year 1846.

People in masks were hurrying about the streets, the wild night was full of music. Revelers sang in the cabarets. About midnight things were quieter, but with the first faint light of day, crowds of masked figures filled the streets once more. The strains of the latest popular song sounded from every throat. Chicken soup flowed in streams.

Then the merry masks disappeared. It was quiet in Montmartre, quiet in all the little brasseries, quiet in the Café des Aveugles, where there was an orchestra of blind musicians so that they should not be shocked by the immorality practiced there. Only in the neighborhood of the Halles a few persistent revelers still prowled about, making their way round the carts and barrows, ready for the morning's business, and looking about for a cabaret which might still be open. In some places the market people had made fires to keep themselves warm, like soldiers in camp. Country people were sitting round them, but if you had come nearer you would have heard them talking of the Bourse and of sales; they were local traders disguised to inspire more confidence.

From the best restaurants, where you find men and women in evening dress, came the smell of onion soup. Oysters from Ostend. In some inferior ones you could have cherries in brandy; in the worst ones only hot cider. The size of the glass was the same, but not the prices. A gentleman paid four sous, a girl two, and a poor man only one. It was all a matter of appearances.

"Give me a glass at a sou," said a seedy-looking old man.

"Four sous from you—you look as if you could afford it."

"It's a relic of past grandeur. I haven't the money for a glass at four sous."

"I'll make it two then."

The deal was done. The men drinking round the table laughed at the good joke. The man's face was all wrinkled and the hair on his temples was gray, his figure bent. But he took no notice of the laughter and drank his cider.

"You go home to bed, old boy," they called to him. "Since when have old granddaddies of eighty gone out dancing?"

"I'm fifty," said the old man gravely.

That silenced them for the moment, and then one said insultingly:

"I bet you went the pace, too. You look more than fifty."

"I lived as best I knew," the old man cut him short. "But you aren't living as you should."

"What d'you mean?"

"You sit here—drinking—and your young children go out to work already . . ."

"You shut it or I'll pitch you out," shouted the landlord. "I'm not going to have my place closed because of your babbling."

"And all the pity they get!" The old man refused to be interrupted. "They've given them a break at midday. Go on, women—have more children, as many of them as possible. And what about the men? What's the matter with them? You get up a revolution, let yourselves be shot—and then it's all the same as it was before."

"Another word and I'll . . ."

"Because you're fools!" shouted the old man as loud as his quavering voice would let him. "Because you're always victorious—and you always let victory be filched from you."

The landlord took him by the collar and threw him out. The old man was weak, and he had been drinking. He stumbled and fell straight into a basket of roses which some flower girls were getting ready for the morning.

"Roses!" he groaned and pressed his face into their fresh, moist petals. "How sweet they smell!"

But the flower girls were not pleased. They pulled him up by force and he felt their fists on his head and back.

"Why, the man's drunk!"

"Sergeant! Call the sergeant!"

They jostled him from side to side, laughing at his pale, helpless face.

"Why, I know you—I've seen you somewhere—you old lazy-bones!"

"Isn't he a clown from the theater?"

"That's it!" And they joined in the chorus, "Ho—ho—ho! Debureau!"

A police patrol appeared at the corner of the street, but someone suddenly took Gaspard by the arm and led him away, supporting him.

"Come along! Come with me, please!"

Gaspard let himself be led along. The man who had come to his rescue was well-dressed. Gaspard glanced at him sideways as they went along. He had a white face and deep-set eyes, pale powdered cheeks, a bony neck in a clean collar, an overcoat of glossy black cloth. Everything simple and faultless.

"But where are you taking me?"

"Away from trouble. I couldn't bear to see them jeering at you, and I didn't want you to be taken up. What were those women calling you?"

"Oh, that's an old story . . ." They walked on slowly. The sky grew lighter. Pale faces began to appear around them.

"Are you an actor?" asked the polished young man presently.

"Not now, Monsieur. And what are you?"

"It's not important. I write."

"An artist? No!"

"Why not?"

Gaspard stopped, and stood unsteadily staring at his guide.

"Where is your flowing mane? Your scarlet coat? The wild language—and all the rest of it?"

"Is all that necessary to art?" asked the strange young man.

"They always used to say so. But you, with your courtesy, your faultless dress—no!"

"Let's go on, please." The young man took him by the arm again. "I'll take you home. Where do you live?"

"I'm not going home, Monsieur."

"Where shall I take you, please? I'm sorry for you."

"For me? No, you should be sorry for the people. You—the new artists in your orderly clothes—are you going to carry out the liberation of the people?"

"That's a hard question."

"Hard?" smiled Gaspard. "Do you know this?"

"Tout roi que la peur désenivre  
Nous prodigue aussi les joujoux.  
N'allez pas vous lasser de vivre:  
Bons esclaves, amusez-vous."

"That's Béranger."

"Yes. Unless you go the way he went, you'll do nothing useful."

"You can't tell Art the way she must go. Every precept lessens her force. In poetry, truth doesn't matter."

"Perhaps not," admitted Debureau sadly. "I don't understand poetry, I only want to help the people—don't you?"

"I?" asked the young man astonished. "I don't know how to, Monsieur. I can only do the thing I know. To write poetry fills me with rapture, so I compose rapturous poems."

"And the people? Do they like your poetry?"

"They say so, at least some of them. Others condemn them."

"If some of them like them, it's enough. So long as you give them something. But believe me, art only has significance if it's directed towards the people."

"Thank you, Monsieur," said the poet. "But I'm afraid you are feverish. It really would be best if you went home."

"No," Debureau resisted him. "This conversation with you about serious things has sobered me. I have duty to perform."

"What is that?"

"The working people are demonstrating today with their banners."

"The Garde Nationale will be sent out against them."

"I must go there. I want to see it."

"They may break out."

"I wish they would!"

"But you don't want human blood to be spilled?"

"Every human suffering grieves me, Monsieur, but sometimes something more is at stake."

"What is greater? Beauty!"

"That's what I always used to say, Monsieur. But beauty in the world—that means truth, justice, freedom! And for the sake of that beauty even precious human blood may be spilt—to prevent greater suffering."

"I'll come with you," the poet decided suddenly.

"You wanted to take me—and now I'm taking you," smiled Debureau. "This is the place. Look!"

At the end of the Rue St. Antoine was a small barricade. A patrol of the Garde Nationale was passing behind it. A workman armed with a gun and with a sash round his waist stopped Gaspard and his companion.

"Don't go any further, it's dangerous."

"Why?"

"They've forbidden the demonstration. The Garde Nationale are arresting people."

"You see?" Debureau pointed. "They've set them against each other—the people against the people—one Frenchman

against another. They're to kill each other so that a couple of millionaires on top may flourish as the green bay tree. But some day—some day—when they realize that and combine—" He was seized with a fit of coughing and stopped.

"You talk too much, Monsieur. It's a cold morning."

"You're right," agreed Debureau. "I talk a lot now I'm old, it's true. But you must forgive me. All my life I've talked so little—hardly even a word. I was an actor in dumb-show."

Shouting arose on two sides of them. The couple of boards across the road were not intended as a barricade for fighting, but it began to look as if that was how they would be used. Bands of armed men came rushing from both sides. On the left was the workers' banner, on the right the Garde Nationale.

"How can I make them understand? How can I stop them fighting?" cried Debureau.

"Come, Monsieur, you're ill and you won't achieve anything here."

They threaded their way through the hurrying ranks. Both sides hurried as far as the barricade and stood still, stopped by the obstruction between them. But suddenly Gaspard tore himself from the poet's hand. He pointed upwards across the road. A man was standing at a window; he had a gun in his hands and was taking aim. He might not be going to shoot, but he was aiming—aiming at the first rank of workmen.

"Godet!" breathed Debureau. "Judas Godet."

He flung himself into the procession again. He stopped the first workman whom he saw running away and snatched a pistol out of his hand. He steadied it and took aim. A shot rang out. The man in the window dropped his gun and fell back.

The shot echoed and re-echoed from the walls of the houses, and like oil cast on a furnace, caused a tumult among the ranks under the workers' banner. The front ranks moved, weapons were aimed, the Garde Nationale advanced. A few more shots rang out; the workers, who had taken courage, advanced quickly. The army clearly did not want to use their weapons; they began to draw back. That shot was needed.

Godet appeared cautiously once more at the window above, with a blood-stained handkerchief round his hand.

"Take care, Godet!" Debureau hissed. And he cried to the others, "Mind that man, he's a Judas!"

But some armed workmen had already hurried into the

house and presently Godet disappeared, abruptly pulled down from the window.

In front they were singing "The Marseillaise."

But the young poet dragged Gaspard back by force, not heeding his entreaties. As soon as the way was clear he took a fiacre and drove him to the street in the Faubourg du Temple where he handed him over, half-delirious, to Charles Debureau.

"How can I thank you, Monsieur."

"By taking the greatest care of him. Au revoir, Monsieur."

He went away and Gaspard never knew that his companion had been Charles Baudelaire. And only the poet knew that it was Gaspard's shot which gave the workers courage that day. That shot sounded so persistently in brave men's ears, that a few months later France was a republic for the second time.

Gaspard's son, the new Pierrot of the Théâtre des Funambules, who had already won the public's favor, leaned over his father's sickbed. From time to time there was a knock at the door and one of his old friends from the theater would ask in a whisper from the threshold for news of him. Sometimes Margot came with her son. Aimée did not move from his bedside, but nursed him for days at a time.

Gaspard's eyes in his motionless face watched them all and thanked them with silent gratitude. He had to fight for breath, his lungs hurt so. His body was feverish and he was very weak. But his eyes flitted like a butterfly from face to face and in them was everything that his heart wished to say.

There were others whom his eyes did not see but only his heart—at night, when no one was there and Gaspard was alone with his sickness—He used to see his father and mother, trudging along through their difficult, sorrowful life. But often they would rise almost as if they would fly away. Look, Gaspard, they seemed to say, see how free we are! Can you see your brothers and sisters? Do you remember us, they would ask, do you remember us? Shades of friends used to come to his bedside, friends of whom he had lost sight and did not even know if they were still alive. All his past life passed in review beside his bed during these feverish nights as if to render him the last honors.

And when it was quietest of all, women would come, lovely transparent girls whom he had only seen once and yet remembered. Girls who had made his heart throb without their ever guessing it, and without his ever daring to speak to them. They

were all his devoted friends now and in their faces, bending down close to him, the old sick Pierrot read nothing but love, tenderness and purity.

Margot came, the Margot of long ago in her cherry-colored stockings. Désirée, the girl who had walked with him in the Luxembourg Gardens; Aimée with her cheerful smile, and the older Aimée with her careworn face, offering him a tisane of lime blossom—all of them came. And when there was no sound, either of the rain tapping the panes or the weather cock creaking on the roof, when Gaspard's own breathing was quiet, a lovely wraith would steal in in a silvery chiffon gown— She would look at the sick man with such tenderness in her eyes and would take the camélias from her waist and lay them on his pillow. Then she would look at him again with her dark eyes, and her lips would murmur something—what were they whispering? Ah, mon ami Pierrot! The greatest of the Pierrots!

Thanks, thanks for your visit, sweet and lovely wraith!

After that would come the dawn, and he had to say farewell to her. The morning came bringing the doctor with his pills and his advice, bringing the white daylight and the dreariness of life, bitter infusions, mournful visitors, or loneliness more mournful still—all the trials of an ill and helpless old man with nothing left to look forward to.

"What d'you think, Dad, another new theater's starting burlesque. People are singing the songs all along the boulevards!"

"It's the end of the old, good acting," whispered Gaspard.

"But the Funambules will hold out against it. We're not going to let ourselves be swallowed up by these wretched farces. We must uphold the pantomime."

"And—the people?"

"They say the farces are poor stuff—but they go to see them."

Gaspard took hold of his son's hand and said softly:

"Don't give up your art. Don't let yourself be led away by cheap success."

"Never fear, Dad."

"If someone—somewhere—still remembers that I—brought Pierrot to life—from the dead. . . ."

"Everyone will know it always."

"Hardly. None of these young people who wear my mask at dances and carnivals. . . ."

"They all remember."

But Debureau did not believe the lie.

"Any news today?"

"They all asked after you. I told them you're a little better. And I've heard news of . . ."

"Yes? Tell me!"

"It seems that Mademoiselle Duplessis is really very ill this time. They say—she's not expected to recover."

"How very sad! And she's so young!"

"They say it's consumption."

"Poor girl. Go and buy a bunch of camélias, Charles, and send them to her . . ."

"Who shall I say they're from?"

"No one. Or—wait—write 'l'ami Pierrot.'"

"Yes, Dad. I'll see to it at once." He went out and Aimée took his place by the bedside.

"You have such clear eyes today, Monsieur Debureau."

"Perhaps I'm seeing further."

He did not want to talk. He looked through the window at the roofs opposite and the tops of the trees. It was March. Spring was advancing on Paris. Soon all the twigs would get green once more. The sick man felt happy at the thought.

"You'll always take care of my son, won't you, Aimée?"

"Why do you ask?" Aimée turned sadly.

"I know you will."

Charles came back. He had sent the bunch of white camélias.

Evening drew slowly on and laid its hand on the windows from outside. Soon the treetops could only be seen as silhouettes against the sky, and then the dusk swallowed everything. The younger Debureau got ready to go to the theater.

"Do you know the one thing I regret, Charles?"

"What, Dad?"

"That I never saw my native land again."

"Bohemia?"

"Yes. I think it must be very beautiful."

"Can you still remember it?"

"Those memories seem the clearest of all to me now."

"Shsh!" Aimée reminded them of the doctor's orders.

"Don't worry, Aimée, I'm much better now. I was thinking—" he went on quietly half to himself "—of a country road—with poplars growing along it—it seems very far away—and very beautiful . . ."

Charles said good-by to Aimée with a glance and quietly



shut the door behind him. Aimée sat down again beside the bed and softly stroked the sick man's hands. He was hardly whispering now, but there was a smile on his face which had never been there before. Pierrot had never had such happy memories.

"The nights used to be misty. And near our cottage—there were meadows—with horses grazing in them—they stayed out all night—and I used to hear their bells . . ."

Aimée had tears in her eyes as she tenderly stroked his hand.

"And at midday their master blew a trumpet very loud—and they all trooped home obediently . . ."

There was a long silence.

"Do go to sleep," she begged him.

He turned his head slightly.

"No, I'm remembering—on Sundays it was quiet by the river—and a bird sang in the reeds—and I used to wait to hear those bells on the white and brown horses . . ."

There was a knock at the door.

"And the country road with the poplars—went a long—long way . . ."

Aimée got up and went to the door.

A moment later she returned with a little bunch of red camélias.

"Monsieur Debureau, here's . . ."

But his body was lying unnaturally, as if it had suddenly slipped down helplessly. His head had fallen back. And Aimée did not need to touch his hands to know that they were cold. His eloquent face told her with its last expression: Look, Aimée, how far my road has led me—from my country—how far! . . .

Aimée bent down to the bed and laid on his breast the bunch of red camélias with a card on which a hand, weak with illness, had written:

"To the greatest of the Pierrots."





